THE WAY HOME

BY THE AUTHOR OF

THE INNER SHRINE

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THE WAY HOME

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ALL WAS GOLD-GREEN

THE WAY HOME

By BASIL KING

Author of "The Inner Shrine," "The Wild Olive," Etc.

With Four Illustrations
By W. H. D. KOERNER

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ILLUSTRATIONS

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BOOK I

THE WAY HOME

CHAPTER I

AN incident like that of the missionary box could not but fix in Charlie Grace's mind the approximate date of his first conscious wish to be a clergyman. Thinking it over in after life, he reckoned that it must have been in 1874, when he was five years old. While other childish happenings grew dim to incoherence this one stood out clearly. He came, indeed, to take it as the starting-point of his personal activity, referring back to it as the beginning of things rather than to his birth.

All sorts of trifles would recall it—a packing-case of a certain size, a button of the pattern on his sailor suit, an old fashion-plate representing ladies in chignons and Grecian bends, the scent of table-linen, a mention of the Colorado plains. The Colorado plains in particular opened up new realms to the imagination of a little boy whose horizon had been bounded hitherto by the sky-line of Vandiver Place, and whose most important excursions into the world had been made on the horse-cars in Broadway.

Not that Broadway was then what it is to-day; nor Vandiver Place, either, for the matter of that. The latter especially retained its character as one of

those quiet thoroughfares known as residential. Except where its uniformity was broken, on one side by a row of gray freestone dwellings in a pillared, pseudo-classic style, and on the other by the quasi-Gothic spires and gables of St. David's Church and rectory, the brownstone front, with its high basement and high steps and quasi-Renaissance portico gave to the little street an air of mid-nineteenth-century repose. Vandiver Place was still "up-town." Wealthy merchants and professional men were still its residents. The congregation at St. David's was still representative of "old New York." The incumbency of St. David's was still a thing to be desired by gifted or ambitious clergymen.

Charlie Grace was born in the old rectory. It was called the old rectory as early as 1874, though it was one of Robertson's creations, dating only from the fifties. As an expression of architectural taste it was inspired by the Oxford Movement and the Gothic revival as then understood. It is a matter of history that Robertson took Amiens Cathedral as his model for St. David's Church, and as an Amiens Cathedral in Connecticut brownstone, dwarfed, denuded, and deformed, bearing to its original the relation of a wizened baby to a full-grown man, it stands. For the rectory Robertson got his ideas from an English deanery, edifying the New York of his day with a reproduction which was held to be truly ecclesiastical. Charlie Grace's first impressions were, therefore, of doors with pointed arches and corridors artificially vaulted. It was in a dining-room with Gothic windows adapting themselves awkwardly to muslin curtains and pots of jonquils in spring that he first heard mention made of the Colorado plains.

His father had been reading to his mother a letter of the kind familiar to well-disposed persons as an appeal.

"Mapleton is not a town; it is only a region where the shacks are nearer together than elsewhere. My wife and I find it a convenient center for our work, while the school, elementary though it is, offers some opportunities to our children. We suffer chiefly not from lack of food and shelter, but from want of books, clothing, and household necessities. There is no town nearer than Proctor at which we can purchase anything. Our children miss the natural amusements of youth, for the country in itself possesses few resources in that direction. You must understand that the plains are not really plains at all, but great sand-dunes sparsely covered with vegetation. There are not infrequent signs of habitation, but on the smallest scale—here and there a shack with a few tiny outbuildings surrounded by a few meager cottonwood trees. We are about halfway up on the long ascent of nearly five thousand feet leading toward Denver. As one rides one sees nothing but mounting wave on mounting wave, while one has a sense of always approaching what I may call a jumping-off place at which one never arrives. Little grows besides a coarse kind of grass, a few wild flowers, and the sage-brush dotting the landscape with what look like innumerable green sponges. The shacks are often miles and miles apart, and the solitude is awful. My children are four in number. Bertha, the eldest, who is twelve years old, but small for her age, has need of . . ."

It was natural enough that during the next few weeks a little boy's fancy should transcend the limitations of Vandiver Place and the glories of Broadway to roam the endless mounting stretches of sand that produced so striking a novelty as green sponges. In some dim way he had understood the clergyman's life, as exemplified by his father, to be one of dignity; now he began to perceive that it could possess elements of romance. Later, when they filled the missionary box in the Gothic rectory drawing-room, he saw with his own eyes that it was also a career of privilege. Privilege, romance, and dignity were enough to fire the ambition of any little boy in whom the seed of intention to become some one in the world was already sprouting.

By dint of being an unheeded listener to letters and conversations supposed to be beyond his sphere of interest he was soon more familiar with the needs of the family on the Colorado plains than any of the ladies bent on supplying them. He knew that it was Bertha who wanted the grammar-book, and that it was Georgie who lacked a warm winter coat, as well as the precise degree to which Tommy was hard on his boots. He knew how the baby boy was growing, and the gratitude Mrs. Waters would feel to any kind mother who would help her to put the child "into pants." Intimate as he had grown with their separate needs, it was gratifying to see them so liberally met. Books, boots, clothes, underclothes, bed-linen, table-linen, tooth-brushes, tooth-powder, soap, flannel, candies, towels, ink, groceries, sponges, toys, went into the packing-case in turn. Now and then his mother came near enough to his chair for him to whisper. "Wasn't it kind of Miss Smedley to give

Bertha that nice hat, mama!" or "Georgie won't be cold now, will he, mama, with that nice reefer from Mrs. Hornblower?" Once, when his mother stood beside him for a minute or two, he had time to say, "It's nice to be a clergyman and get all these nice presents, isn't it, mama?" to which she replied: "Yes, dear. It's nice to be a clergyman for a good many reasons besides that." He thought he remembered adding, "Sha'n't I be a clergyman when I'm big, mama, and get a nice big box of raisins and ink and tooth-brushes, too?" His mother had replied, "I hope so, dear," or something like that, before hurrying forward to take a fur cap or a box of sweets from the hands of some newly arriving visitor.

From wondering at the donations he fell to thinking in a childish way of the power of those who could make such gifts without uncomfortably straining their resources. He had come to a sense that in this world there were people who were rich and people who were poor, and that the rich could do things impossible to gentlemen and ladies in the position of his parents. Perhaps he could not have lived in Vandiver Place, even as far back as 1874, without knowing it. The very children with whom he played forced the fact home upon him.

"You can't have a French governess like mine," Freddy Furnival had observed to him one day not long before. "My mother says your mother can't afford it."

The remark was quite irrelevant, thrown out as they raced their wheelbarrows round the bit of grass-plot that lay between the rectory and the street under the south transept of Amiens Cathedral.

Charlie Grace could only retort, "Well, your papa can't give out the hymns on Sunday and make all the people get up and sit down."

"My papa don't want to. He's a doctor. He makes people sick. You didn't have rice-pudding to-day. We did."

Charlie Grace, not having had rice-pudding that day, felt at a disadvantage. He felt at a disadvantage on general principles, too. A word had been used that caused him a vague discomfort. Not that he knew its meaning—quite. It only distressed him, with a kind of atavistic alarm. It was as if it had been used like a whip on all the generations preceding him, as if he had felt its scourge in a previous life. He had it in his mind all that day. He had it in his mind as he knelt on his bed that night to say his prayers, his mother standing beside him, covering his folded hands with one of hers.

"God bless my papa, and my mama, and my brother Edward, and my sister Emma, and her little girl, and Mr. Tomlinson, and Mr. Legrand and Mrs. Legrand, and Bridget, and Julia, and Remnant, and Miss Smedley because she gave me my wheelbarrow, and Mrs. Hornblower because she gave me my rocking-horse, and make me a good boy. Amen. Mama, what's 'afford'?"

"What's what, dear?"

"'Afford.' Why can't people afford a French governess like Freddy Furnival?"

The word was explained to him. He had no trouble in understanding it. He felt it at once to be a term he had been in need of. It solved mysteries. It put people and things into perspective. It accounted for the strength of the strong and the

weakness of the weak. Incidentally, it ranged Freddy Furnival with the former and himself and his father and mother with the latter, and left a sense of dissatisfaction. He felt somewhat as a negro child must feel when the knowledge first comes to him that he has been born black.

So from the bewildering excitement of largess his mind traveled to those who were able to "afford" it. It did so less in envy than in emulation. There was little envy in his nature. What was really instinctive was his desire to do what others did; as much as they did, if not more. He was uneasy to see that others could contribute to the wants of the Waters family while he was considered negligible, impotent. Rebellion against this paralysis of good intention grew acute when Mrs. Furnival opened a cardboard box and said:

"See. My little Freddy has sent this. It will be lovely for the little boy."

Charlie Grace did not have to look a second time to know that the box contained a train that would go round in a circle when you touched a spring concealed in the engine. He knew, too, that the machinery was out of gear from over-usage, and that several of the tin wheels were off. He himself had inflicted some damage on the string of cars by kicking them over, in a moment of rage against Freddy, when they were in full career. These injuries diminished but slightly the value of the thing as a possession, since a train may be more a train than ever after it has been in collision or has met with accident. The point that hurt was that Freddy Furnival could send a present to the Waters child while his own aid had never been invited. He felt

himself overlooked, left out of the movement. Even the lack of personal recognition was secondary to the slight upon his powers.

In spite of his fear of obtruding himself too noticeably into the group of ladies circling about the packing-case like doves round a fountain, he glided from his perch and approached his mother timidly.

"Mama," he whispered, slipping his hand into hers, "can't I put something into the box, too?"

His mother smiled. "My poor darling, I don't think you've anything left. All your toys went to the last Christmas tree at the Mission Church, and all your old picture-books." Still smiling, she lifted her sweet, shy eyes on the ladies who had momentarily paused in their work. "We have to make so many clean sweeps that poor Charlie can never keep anything for himself."

"I've got my wheelbarrow," he corrected, in a loud whisper.

"Oh, but that's too big, dear. Besides, Miss Smedley gave it to you, and she wouldn't like you to give it away."

"Well, my rocking-horse, then."

"Mrs. Hornblower gave you that. She wouldn't like it, either."

"No; she wouldn't like it, either," Mrs. Hornblower herself echoed in a deep voice. He would have made an attempt to plead with her had she not added: "Come along, ladies. We must finish before lunch. Little boys mustn't bother," she added, crushingly.

That night he left Mrs. Hornblower permanently out of his petitions.

In the mean time his energies were astir. That dogged element in his nature which opposition was always to arouse began to declare itself. He would put something into the missionary box, no matter what, no matter how. He stole back to his high seat in the corner.

His plans had ripened before the last parcel was secured in its resting-place, and the whole achievement neatly covered with layers of old papers. It was to be Remnant's task to nail the cover on, and the rector's to write the address. The ladies could now troop off to the dining-room to refresh themselves.

Charlie Grace knew what he meant to do. Having first looked into his own small room to assure himself that there was nothing left in his possession that could be given away, he threaded the passages leading from the rectory to the church. In the church, as he expected, he found Remnant. Remnant was preparing for a funeral. Having set up the trestles on which the coffin was to rest, he was leisurely dusting them.

"Burying Mrs. Badger," he explained, as the boy drew near. "That 'll be one boss the less for me. There's women as don't see anything in religion but just to boss the sexton. 'Censorious' is what I call 'em. This here Mrs. Badger 'u'd scent a speck o' dust in her pew before she'd turned the corner of Vandiver Place. There's a lot of hollerness to religion, sonny. If you was a sexton you'd know. Some people think it's a soft snap, being a sexton—just christening people and marrying 'em and burying 'em, like; but, Lord! if they had this job. If some old lady's feet is cold it's my fault; and if

there's a draught down her neck it's my fault; and if the church is stuffy it's my fault; and if the windows is open it's my fault; and if they're shut it's my fault. I'll bet you if this here old Mrs. Badger could speak she'd say it was my fault as she's gone to work and died."

Remnant waved the duster oratorically. He was a little, dark man, not over thirty-five, covered up just now in a long black dust-cloak, like a gaberdine, which would presently be discarded for a beadle's gown, in honor of Mrs. Badger. He was fond of saying he had been "born a sexton," his father in his lifetime having had the care of St. David's, transmitting it to his son.

"Want to put something into that missionary box, do you, sonny? Now I don't hold with them missionary boxes, nohow. I say, 'Give a man a decent salary, and let him live on it.' I say, 'Don't ask a man to get along on starvation wages, just so as you can keep him where he'll have to come and lick your hand in the hopes of getting a present. That's the way sextons is treated all over the world. They're kept down. The clergy is kept down, too, but not so much as sextons. There ain't an old lady as comes to St. David's that don't think she's got me and your pa in her pocket—and me more than your pa. And that's what they call religion."

The little boy saw an opening. It was the ladies of Remnant's dislike who stood in the way of his making a contribution to the missionary box. Would it not be a legitimate bit of retaliation if by putting their heads together they could outwit them? With some glee Remnant seized the idea before it was fully expressed.

"Say," he whispered. "Up in the loft above the Sunday-school room there's an old chest full of stuff. The Girls' Friendlies uses the things when they get up their plays. Come along and we'll see what there is."

"We haven't much time," the little boy warned him. "Unless I get it into the box while they're at lunch I can't do it at all."

Remnant looked at his watch. It was already late for their purpose. "Come along," he said again; and the preparations for burying Mrs. Badger were suspended.

The loft was distant and up a dark stairway. Time was lost while Remnant looked for a candle to light them along. Thus there was no leisure for selection when at last they stood by the open chest.

"Just dive in your hand, sonny," Remnant counseled, "as if it was a bran-pie, like, and take the first thing you get hold of."

The element of chance appealing to Charlie Grace's sporting instincts, he did as directed. Out of the dusty hodge-podge in the chest he drew forth a small, soft package, flat and shapeless, wrapped in silver paper. It was an occasion on which one thing was as good as another. The conspirators stole back to the schoolroom below. "Now, let's see," Remnant said, eagerly.

On examining the prize and finding nothing but a wig—a man's iron-gray wig—clumsily made and shaggy, but still a wig—Remnant made no secret of his disgust.

"That won't do," he said, contemptuously. "It's one of them Girls' Friendly things. It's for their plays. It 'll be no use at all in a missionary box."

But Charlie Grace was of a different opinion. Not only would this donation be on original lines, differing from the sponges and flannel and stationery of other contributors, but he could see already the uses to which Bertha and Georgie and Tommy would put it. To any company of children in the world a wig must be a possession, a source of inspiration, a point of departure. It could be turned to as many uses as a mask. Moreover, masks were common, toys were common, games and picture-books were common; but a wig was rare. With a wig to put on his head and stir his fancy there was no limit to the things he, Charlie Grace, could be. He could be a clergyman giving out hymns and pounding a pulpit; he could be General Grant leading the army to war; he could be a policeman, or a postman, or a garbage-man. Out on the Colorado plains a wig must be even more a boon than in Vandiver Place, so to the Colorado plains it should go.

He did not reason the subject out in words, or put it before Remnant otherwise than with the laconic assertion, "They'll like it, Remnant; I know they will," but he had his way. Within five minutes the wig was beneath the lowest of the layers of old newspapers with which the contents of the packing-case were protected; and Remnant, alive to the urgency of the moment, and chuckling over the neat way in which his "bosses" had been outflanked, was nailing up the box.

CHAPTER II

FOR a few weeks there was no sequel to the foregoing incident except for certain states of mind excited in Charlie Grace.

He discovered, in the first place, that by taking the initiative and keeping his counsel it was possible to get his own way even in the teeth of authority. His satisfaction with this result was all the greater since it ranked him with that strong class represented by Freddy Furnival. It took him out of the army of the relatively powerless, into which, he felt, his father and mother had been somehow thrust. He dwelt much on this fact concerning them. He did it a little wistfully, with some sense of being disillusioned. He had taken them hitherto to be immense, majestic creatures to whom nothing was impossible. He began to see them now as oddly hampered in ways in which he had thought them free. There were things they couldn't command, things they couldn't "afford." The knowledge gave him a twinge of humiliation that amounted to a new sensation. He didn't like it.

Social phenomena he had taken for granted began to assume significance.

"Mama," he said, one evening, when his mother was putting him to bed, "whenever Fanny Hornblower comes to play with me she comes in a carriage with two black horses."

"Yes, dear?"

"Well, why don't I have a carriage and two black horses when I go to play with her? I go on the horse-car, with colored people in it."

He knew perfectly well by this time what the answer would be. He had asked the question partly for corroboration, partly in the hope of further enlightenment.

"Fanny Hornblower has a carriage, dear, because her papa is rich."

This was the reply he had expected. It would do well enough as a starting-point. "Well, why isn't my papa rich?"

"Because, darling, when any one becomes a clergyman he makes up his mind to be poor."

"But why doesn't he make up his mind to be rich?"

Here, however, his mother failed him. "You wouldn't understand that now, dear. I must tell you some other time, when you're older."

He sighed the sigh of resignation. He had ceased to combat the obsession of grown-up people that little boys couldn't understand what was properly explained to them. The subject even passed from his mind for several days.

He was a queer lad, with spells of being active and mischievous, and other spells in which he fell into a state of dreamy meditation. His features changed readily with the feeling of the moment. In restless days his look was eager, aggressive, pugnacious. His small, deep-set eyes, over which the eyebrows were irregular, would dance then, and become of a steely blue, while his shock of wavy yellow hair, too fair to be red, would be either bristling or tousled. What characterized him even more was the lifting of his chin—

the long, rather pointed chin inherited from his mother. In her case the oval of the face would have been perfect had it not been marred by this slight elongation at the tip. The boy had the same oval, with the same irregularity, but he had a habit of thrusting the errant feature forward, of tilting it upward, in a manner that meant obstinacy or will-power, according to one's point of view. When he was naughty there was no question but that the lifted chin was stubborn; when he was simply trying to do his best it was taken to denote concentration of mind.

Concentration of mind was noticeable chiefly on the days when he was "good." It was real concentration, too. He would sit for long periods—five minutes, ten minutes, a quarter of an hour, perhaps—with no movement to express his feelings but the swinging of his scarlet legs. His mother complained that he wore out his boots on the inner sides by scuffing them together in these fits of meditation. It was curious to see then how the tilting of his chin changed in expression. It became contemplative, yearning, like the chins of the cherubs in the "Madonna di San Sisto." His eyes, too, would darken to violet, and his mouth, which always drooped at the corners, would droop more.

"What is my little boy thinking of?" his mother sometimes said when she found him brooding in this way. But his answer, if he answered at all, rarely gave her the information she desired. He grew shy of asking questions bearing too directly on the problems of life. Nevertheless, he responded on one occasion with:

"Mama, are we like Hattie Bright?"

He was kneeling on his bed, in his night-shirt. He

was ready for his prayers, though he had not yet begun them. His mother's back was turned as she folded the clothes he had just taken off. She reflected a minute, trying to catch his drift. She was obliged in the end to say:

"I don't know what you mean, dear."

"Why did papa say Hattie Bright's mama was so"—he stumbled at the word, blushing a little—"so sensifit?"

"Sensitive, darling. Papa did say she was sensitive, because she is."

"What *is* sen-si-tive, mama?" He said the word slowly but correctly.

"It's thinking that people mean to hurt your feelings when perhaps they don't."

"Does Hattie Bright's mama think people mean to hurt her feelings?"

"Sometimes, dear."

"Is that because she's poor?"

"It's because she has to work—to keep a boarding-house—and she's afraid some of the other ladies in the church don't think she's just as goo—just the same—as they are."

"And *is* she just the same as they are, mama?"

"In God's sight she is, dear. You'd better say your prayers now, darling, and go to sleep."

He knelt erect on the bed, folding his hands, which she covered with one of her own. After he had closed his eyes devoutly he opened them again.

"Mama, could I say 'bless Hattie Bright's mama' after I've said Bridget and Julia and Remnant?"

"Certainly, darling. You can always pray for any one."

The prayers proceeded, while the mother pondered

over the initial question. More than once of late she had been puzzled in trying to follow the workings of the child's mind. She thought it well to ask, when he had said his 'Amen' and was curling down into bed:

"What did you mean just now, dear, when you asked if we were like Hattie Bright?"

But shyness had overtaken him again. "Nothing, mama."

She moved about the room, putting it in order for the night. "Don't you like to play with her?" she persisted.

"I do. Freddy don't. Freddy's mama won't let him. She says Hattie Bright isn't good enough. Freddy told me. That's what you were going to say just now, mama—isn't it?—when you changed it to something else."

His perspicacity alarmed her. She wished she could have consulted his father. For the moment she felt it her duty to answer him to the best of her skill.

"That's an expression, dear, which we shouldn't use. That's why I changed it. When you hear people using it—like Freddy, for instance—you may know they don't quite understand—"

"Are people not good when they're poor, mama? Are they bad?"

"No, darling. Christ was poor—"

"But He could have been rich if He'd liked. It says in my *Bible Stories* He could."

"And He didn't care to be. That's just it. It shows how little it matters whether people are rich or poor."

"It matters if they're not good enough. If Hattie Bright's mama wasn't poor she'd be good enough to play with Freddy. Is she good enough to play with me, mama?"

"She does play with you, doesn't she? And you *know* she's good."

"She's good when she doesn't spit and say naughty words. She said a' awful naughty word the last time. Do you want to know what naughty word she said, mama?"

"No, dear. It isn't nice to repeat things—"

"It was 'divil,'" he insisted. "Wasn't that a' awful word, mama?"

There followed a little homily on the sin of tale-bearing—a subject which the boy found less exciting than the rights of man, for in the midst of it he fell asleep.

The next few days saw him criticizing his mother's words as inconclusive. There was a flaw in her reasoning somewhere, though he couldn't lay his finger on the spot. She was unwilling to be definite as to the status of Hattie Bright, while she dodged the whole question of his position between Hattie Bright and Freddy Furnival. It was a nice point, that, as to whether, if Hattie Bright wasn't good enough to play with Freddy Furnival, she was good enough to play with him. A number of delicate considerations were involved in it. It would have borne discussion—but she had dodged it. He had seen her dodge it as plainly as if she had dodged in a game of "chase." He pardoned it to her, however, as one of the unaccountable weaknesses of grown-up people—part of their curious inability to be frank. He pardoned it to her the more readily because of his intuitive perception that she was not much clearer on the subject than himself. He had noticed more than once how difficult she found it to answer questions which seemed to him to require but a "Yes"

or a "No." Little by little he began to get his mother into perspective. Little by little she ceased to be the supreme, impersonal maternal force, part of the mystery of being, part of the night of time, to take on the form, proportions, and character of a woman. She began to detach herself from the chaos of primal things to become a woman among women, a woman different from other women. When he compared her with Miss Smedley, or Mrs. Furnival, or Mrs. Hornblower he found her of a finer essence, with a sweeter voice, a lovelier smile, and tenderer ways. He wondered sometimes if all children felt so of all mamas. Fortunately, this was a mystery that could be solved by research into the sentiments of Freddy Furnival; and the method was simple.

"I've got a nicer mother than you," he said to Freddy, one day when amusements palled in the latter's nursery.

"I guess you haven't," was Freddy's sturdy answer. "My mother says your mother is afraid to call her soul her own."

"I guess she ain't."

The assertion was supported by a rush that bore Freddy to the floor. There followed some wild minutes, in which two little sailor-suited bodies rolled together, two little voices yelled, two little heads were pulled, two little faces punched, and four little red legs kicked frantically.

"You say I've got a nicer mother than you," Charlie Grace demanded as the condition of peace.

"I won't. I've got a nicer mother than *you*."

The battle would have been prolonged if Freddy's French governess hadn't rushed into the room, cry-

ing, "*Mon Dieu! Mon Dieu! Qu'est ce qu'il y a? Oh, le méchant! Oh, le méchant!*" as she shook each of them in turn.

The fight thus being a drawn one, the question was left unsolved. Later experiments on Fanny Hornblower and Hattie Bright were no more successful. To his assertion, "I've got a nicer mother than you," Fanny replied by bursting into tears, while Hattie was content to put out her tongue at him, and say, "Who cares?" In the latter instance, however, there was some concession, as though Hattie had resigned herself to what was beyond dispute.

Nevertheless, he observed his mother quietly, in order to assure himself that there was no possible truth in the assertion that she dared not call her soul her own. He didn't need to be told what the charge implied. The figure of speech explained itself. A soul was something inside you, like a sprite or a monkey, that would spring up to heaven when you died. He knew it must be a feeble creature indeed who would not lay claim to so intimate a possession as that.

He didn't find his mother a feeble creature, but he noticed in her manner hesitations, timidities, misgivings he had never chronicled before. She would keep her sweet, shy eyes on his father, like a dog waiting for the word of command. At table she scarcely ate anything herself, so anxious was she that her husband should have what he liked. She came into the rector's study with a frightened air, and never stayed longer than the time necessary to express her errand. Even with Bridget and Julia she was deferential, and when Julia said one

day, "That's something, ma'am, I niver cooked in anny one's house before, and at my time o' life I'm not going to begin," his mother replied, "Oh, very well, Julia," and hurried from the kitchen. With the ladies of the parish she was almost painfully eager to please. She took advice from Mrs. Furnival, and complaints from Mrs. Bright, and snubs from Mrs. Hornblower as though any form of recognition were a kindness. When affection was shown her—as, it must be admitted, was often the case—her gratitude was touching, and generally accompanied by mists of tears.

These indications worried Charlie Grace. He passed many dreamy minutes pondering over their significance. He went so far at last as to bring the subject tactfully before Remnant.

Remnant was in the church "cleaning the bird." The moment was favorable therefore to confidence.

"Some o' them bosses," he observed, as the little boy drew near, "wouldn't think this here brass eagle was shiny enough, not if it gave 'em sunburn to sit under it. It's a regular idol to 'em, that's what it is. If they'd listen to the words your pa reads to them off it they'd have more consideration for *me*."

"My mama isn't afraid of them."

The aggressive tone caused Remnant to cock his eye over the beak of the lectern while he said, dryly:

"Ain't she, though?"

"No, she ain't."

"Then she's not the woman I took her for."

The boy felt his heart sink, though he stood his ground. "What woman *did* you take her for, Remnant?" he asked, subtly.

Remnant muttered his reply under his breath,

while he thrust the chamois leather between the eagle's claws. "I took her for better than some o' them as thought she wasn't good enough to marry your pa—that's who I took her for. But it's something you can't understand, sonny. You're too young. There's a lot of hollerness to religion. You've got to be a sexton to know how some of these old ar-*is*-tocrats 'll feel when a country lawyer's daughter is brought in all of a sudden to rule over them, like. I never see nothing like it—the day the news come. And him a widower for seven years!—just up at Horsehair Hill for a vacation. To be bowled over by a pretty face and a slim figure as if he was a boy, when he might ha' had Miss Smedley and all her money. 'Twas against nature, in a way of speaking. I heard it said that Miss Smedley 'u'd hardly come out o' one faint before she'd go off into another—and there was others just as bad. I tell you it was nuts for me, sonny—though it's not to be wondered at that your poor ma don't hardly dare to call her soul her own."

So that was it. The conditions were incidental to his father's second marriage. It was knowledge still recent to him that his father had married two wives. The information when it came had cleared up certain difficulties that had vexed him ever since his mind had begun to grapple with the subject of human relationships. He had never understood why it was that when Freddy Furnival had lost a sister two years younger than himself, and Fanny Hornblower still possessed a brother two years older, his brother, Edward, should be a man grown and his sister, Emma, a married woman. From such fragments of their letters as he could comprehend he

knew them to be in the course of constructing what seemed like new worlds—Edward at Seattle, and Emma, with her husband, Mr. Tomlinson, in Minnesaba. He had never so much as seen brother Edward, or sister Emma, or brother-in-law Mr. Tomlinson, nor did their correspondence betray inordinate affection toward his mother or himself. Upon these curious conditions, so different from the phenomena of such other domestic circles as had come under his observation, the knowledge that his father had had a wife and family previous to those who now occupied the rectory had produced much the same effect as a candle in a big, dark room—yielding light enough to see by, but leaving vast spaces unillumined.

And now Remnant had lit another candle. There was more light—but light that put all the familiar things out of proportion and cast grotesque, enormous shadows up and down the walls. He had a distinct sense of entering on a world of things too large for him. Of Remnant's words he seized the gist but vaguely. He might have missed even that had it not been for Remnant's repetition of phrases that had already been disturbing. There *was*, then, some resemblance between Hattie Bright and themselves. His mother *had* reason for being timid in her surroundings. "Your poor ma," Remnant had called her, with a compassion Charlie Grace resented. Nevertheless he found himself using the epithet himself: "Your poor ma." It came to him mentally, as the only sufficient expression for his feelings, when, one day at lunch, he saw her pleading with his father to eat the portion of tapioca-pudding he had pushed away contemptuously.

"Do taste it, William. I thought it was what you

liked. You said so. You said so the day you said you didn't like apple-sago. Well, then, let me get you some cheese. We've some very good cheese in the house. I think it's French. You like French cheese, William, don't you? Oh, William!"

The protest came when, with a curt "Nothing, thank you," he rose majestically and marched from the dining-room. He was a big man, who carried himself like a pouter-pigeon. The impression he made was imposing at all times and crushing when he was annoyed.

To the boy the incident was trivial. It was one of those to be dismissed philosophically with the explanation, "Papa's cross." But he could see from his mother's distressed face that it had inner meanings for her, that she took it as another sign of her insufficiency. "Your poor ma."

He could do nothing but slip his hand into hers, saying, "I like you, mama."

"Do you, darling?" came tremulously, as she stooped to brush her cheek against his yellow head. "Well, mama loves her little boy."

There was a repetition of the same emotion when, some days later, Mrs. Hornblower came to call. It being Bridget's afternoon out, he was sent into the drawing-room to offer the great lady cake and wine, which he carried carefully on a silver tray. As he approached her knee she waved him aside, like a sovereign satisfied with a symbolistic tribute, while he heard her say, in her deep voice:

"You've doubtless had news of that missionary box?"

His mother shook her head.

"Then you've written?"

She confessed that she hadn't. "But I'll ask Dr. Grace to write if you think I ought."

"You won't think me carping, but I should write myself. I *think* I should write myself. And you'll pardon me if I say I should do it at once. You'll find that we ladies in New York take much of the burden from our husbands' shoulders. It leaves them more free to concentrate on their own affairs. You can always tell when a lady has been used to things by her efficiency."

"I'll write at once, Mrs. Hornblower. Indeed I will. I'll write to-night."

"Pray do," he heard Mrs. Hornblower say as, carefully balancing himself, he carried his tray from the room again. "You'll oblige me."

"Your poor ma" came unbidden to his mind; and it came again when, not a half-hour later, he was called on to go through the same ceremony of the cake and wine for Mrs. Legrand. He did it the more willingly on this occasion, since he liked Mrs. Legrand and thought her the most beautiful creature in the world, his mama excepted.

"You dear little boy," she laughed, graciously, as he stood before her with his tray. "No, thank you. Well, yes; I will. It's so quaint to be taking cake and wine in the afternoon, don't you know it is? You can hardly fancy how quaint it seems to me, now that every one has five-o'clock tea. I think that's such a nice custom, don't you, Mrs. Grace? Comes from England, you know. Lots of people are adopting it —the Prouds and the Louds and all the best houses. I wish you'd set it up, too, Mrs. Grace. Won't you? Please do. I'm dying to—only I'm afraid it would

look so funny for the assistant's wife to establish it before the rector's."

Her light laugh kept Charlie Grace from listening to his mother's reply. Indeed, he could not have listened in any case, for in the contemplation of young Mrs. Legrand his faculties were taxed to the utmost. Politeness obliging him to stand at a distance till she had finished toying with her wine-glass, his position for surveying her was advantageous. There was never anything, he was sure, so delicate as her features, so graceful as her hands. Her chignon seemed of spun-sugar, while her tiny hat, tilted down toward her forehead, was like some pale-blue flower. Pale blue were the serrated rows of little flounces that covered her dress in front, and pale blue the billowy effects artfully massed behind. She was sitting now, but the boy looked forward to seeing her walk—she would do it with so gracefully balanced a Grecian bend.

"You can hardly fancy how funny it is to be a clergyman's wife," Mrs. Legrand laughed on. "I haven't got used to it, though I've been married nearly two months. It's quite different from anything I ever expected, don't you know it is? Papa and mama would never have let me do it if Rufus hadn't been—well, you know what the Legrands are. I think it's foolish all this caring so much about family, don't you?"

Mrs. Grace thought it natural that those who came of old families should be proud of the fact.

"Well, that's what papa says. He's got books and books about our pedigree—patroons and those things, you know—and Rufus is descended from the famous Lady Esther Legrand. You read about her

in history—how she came over from the English side and nursed the Revolutionary soldiers. But I do think it's foolish laying so much stress upon it, don't you?—especially when you marry into the Church. Not that I think I *have* married into the Church. I've married Rufus. I haven't married a clergyman, but a *man*."

Mrs. Legrand had a way of holding her head to one side, with a challenging smile, as though to say, "Now, what do you think of that?" Her words on this occasion had, however, the lack of conviction which comes from saying the same thing too often. In fact, Mrs. Grace, having heard them before, could let Mrs. Legrand run on.

"So many people think that because you've married a clergyman you become a kind of curate, don't you know they do? But I don't agree with that at all. Mrs. Hornblower doesn't go and help her husband at the bank. I consider a woman's duty is in her home. I consider that a model home is just as much an example to a parish as anything else. I tell Rufus I can't teach a Sunday-school or go and read to old women, but I *can* give him a model home. It would be very funny if I couldn't—don't you think it would?—after the homes I'm used to. My aunt keeps thirteen servants, and I visit a great deal there. And in a congregation like St. David's I should think it *must* make a difference to have people at the head of it who are—who are—well, you know what I mean."

Fortunately, Mrs. Hornblower had supplied the right word. "Who are used to things," Mrs. Grace was able to fill in.

"That's just it. You understand so well, don't you know you do? So many of the clergy and their

wives nowadays—well, they're *not* used to things. That's all you can say *about* them. They come from the queerest sort of families—"

"Dr. Grace's father was a carpenter."

Mrs. Legrand sprang up, with a ruffle of her tiny flounces. "Oh, well, Dr. Grace! He's different. He's so wonderful. And you're so wonderful, too, Mrs. Grace, don't you know you are? There are some people who don't have to have the things other people are dependent on. They're enough in themselves. I'm very democratic that way. I think there's a great deal too much made of family, especially in New York. And Dr. Grace will be a bishop some day, besides. Oh, I *hope* he'll be a bishop. Do make him. Rufus says he refused the bishopric of Southern Arizona, or Southern something, when it was offered him, but I *hope* he won't do it again. I'm going to work on old Mr. Legrand—Rufus's uncle, you know—he's something high up in the General Convention, or whatever it is—so that they'll elect Dr. Grace to the very first nice thing—really *nice* thing, you know—not like Southern Arizona—that turns up. Oh, don't thank me. It's quite selfish on my part because, you see, if Dr. Grace was made a bishop, why, then Rufus— Oh, well, we won't talk about it yet."

Mrs. Legrand set her half-emptied wineglass on the silver tray and dusted the crumbs of cake from the tips of the fingers of her pale-blue kid gloves.

"Oh, you dear little boy!" she cried, patting the youngster on the head. "Isn't he cunning!" she continued, turning to the mother. "Perhaps he'll be a clergyman, too, some day."

Mrs. Grace smiled. "I hope so."

It was such a fascinating prospect that, in spite of his shyness before the visitor, the boy couldn't help whispering, "Shall I, mama?"

"I hope so, dear," was the answer again, in a tone which, as long as he lived, remained a memory in his mental hearing.

He carried his tray to the dining-room sideboard, and when he returned the caller was gone. His mother had reseated herself aimlessly. She rested her arm on a cold marble-topped table while she looked vaguely out through one of the Gothic windows to a spot of sunlight lying warm on the stunted brownstone transept of Amiens Cathedral. After the youth and beauty of the visitor she struck him for the first time in his life as faded and dejected. In her plain gray dress, which complied with the fashion of the day only to the extent of two meager rows of frills, she looked old, too, though she was just over thirty. She hadn't seen him return, so that he could watch her from the doorway. He felt once more that fear concerning her which had haunted him now for a week or two. It became alarm. It became panic. He wanted assurance, comfort. He felt his heart swelling to an irresistible need of speech.

"Mama!" he cried, still from the doorway. "Mama! You're not afraid to call your soul your own, *are* you?"

She turned upon him fiercely. She was haggard. Her open hand struck the table. She had never looked at him so before. "Who said that?"

He burst into loud tears. He was too terrified to

confess. "No one," he blurted out, digging his fists into his eyes. "No one didn't say it at all."

The sudden storm passed from her face. Look and voice grew gentler. "That isn't true, dear. Some one must have said it. Come here and tell me."

Still weeping—for what, he scarcely knew—he dragged himself to her knee. The storm was all over by this time, as she said with her usual tenderness: "Where's your handkerchief, darling? Blow your nose. No; mama isn't afraid to—to call her soul her own. She's only afraid of not being equal to—"

He dried his tears. His sobs were subsiding. "It's the bosses, isn't it, mama?"

She looked puzzled. "The bosses? I don't know what you mean, darling?"

But he could only wipe his face on her skirt, too shy to explain.

CHAPTER III

AT this time, too, Charlie Grace began to see his father as a man. Up to the present the latter had been as the first of the friendly protective elements that made up Vandiver Place—as the living, speaking energy of that happily constituted whole in which Amiens Cathedral, the rectory, the bit of greensward, the brownstone fronts, and the row of gray, pillared houses were all component parts. Dr. William Grace unified them and voiced them; but, like the rest of Vandiver Place, he had remained impersonal, something to be accepted, submitted to, loved, even, but too vast and remote to be within the scope of an inquiring mind.

And now it was as if the dignified, portly man were advancing from the bas-relief of the background and showing himself all round. It was perhaps the boy's first registered observation concerning him, that he *was* dignified and portly. He had taken him so much for granted hitherto as never to have noticed that he was slightly concave in the back, but convex in the frontal outline. He carried himself with the air of one who has a great deal that is honorable to push ahead, and who pushes it ahead with justifiable pride. He could scarcely enter a room without seeming to say, "Here comes the rector of St. David's." If he never used the words, he inspired them, since in those days the rector of

St. David's could not help being a notable figure in New York. He was still more notable in the person of a gifted man in the prime of his maturity, who to the authority of learning added the charm of a handsome presence and a mellifluous voice. The congregation at St. David's wouldn't have liked it if their rector had not held his head a little above other men. It was commonly said that he had the grand manner; and St. David's as it used to be was a church to which the grand manner came as natural as its excellent quartette choir.

Charlie Grace had never been afraid of his papa; he had never, in fact, thought much about him. In as far as he was obliged actively to consider him it was in respect to making as little noise as possible when papa was in his study, to "behaving" at table, and to answering "N or M" to the question "What is your name?" as well as going on with, "My sponsors in baptism, wherein I was made," etc., etc., if called on to explain the provenance of this odd two-lettered appellation.

But there came a day when father and son began to notice each other a little more. Scanning his papa at breakfast one morning, the boy saw that his papa was scanning him. He himself was quite innocently employed in taking notes on the parental features. "Isn't it funny," he was saying to himself, "when papa wrinkles up his forehead his eyelids never move. It makes him look kind of—funny." "Supercilious" was the word he wanted, as any of the brother-clergy could have told him, but "funny" was all he found. It was a word that filled a large place in his vocabulary. He applied it now to his father's heavy, handsome lids, to his large Roman

CHARLIE WAS CALLED ON TO GO THROUGH THE SAME CEREMONY FOR MRS LEGRAND

nose, to his fading mutton-chop whiskers, and to his long, clean-shaven upper lip, of which the central point slightly overhung the lower lip, tempering the solemnity of the face with a touch of *naïveté*.

It was a moment, however, in which the word "funny" was not wholly inappropriate, for the quivering of the corners of his father's long, thin mouth, which drooped slightly as his own did, was certainly a little droll. Now and then, too, he caught a glance telegraphed between his father and mother which, when interpreted, made him think that "Something must be up." The phrase, recently acquired from Remnant, was admirably significant of mystery in the air. He had used it on a number of occasions, and, with some elation in his little soul, had recourse to it again. "Something's up."

In the course of a few minutes it became clear that anything "up" that morning must be in connection with the letters of which a pile lay at his father's left hand. One of them had been passed to his mother with the counsel, "Don't say anything about it." The boy was not so intent on his porridge but that he could see her read it with facial expressions of astonishment, which were reflected in the countenance of his father at the other end of the table. After she had handed it back she asked for it again, reading parts of it once more.

"It's the most extraordinary thing I ever heard of," she commented.

The boy's curiosity was almost unbearable, but he knew enough to apply himself to his porridge, and to take on an air of being lost in thought. Experience had shown this to be the method that

produced the best results. But he was aware that his father shook his head and made a motion with his lips which, had it broken into sound, would have said "Sh-h."

After breakfast, as his parents passed into the hall he saw his father nod backward in his direction while he said:

"Do you think it could possibly be—?"

"Not possibly," his mother replied, with conviction. "I remember everything that happened that morning. I didn't leave the room till—"

The boy caught no more, but he saw himself followed by curious looks. Within a day or two he caught Mr. and Mrs. Legrand glancing at him in the same way. As with his mother he entered the church for the forenoon service on Wednesday morning, Remnant, whom they passed in the porch, very stately in his beadle's gown, got a chance to whisper, "They're on to it, sonny," with a look of alarm which, whether real or feigned, heightened the sense of mystery. Moreover, the idiom was new to the boy, and he had a taste for linguistic novelties. He weighed it and dissected it, pondering its monosyllables one by one, but without extracting their secret. When he found an opportunity, while his mother was turning up the hymn which Mr. Wrench was preluding on the organ, he whispered:

"What does 'They're on to it' mean, mama?"

"On to what, dear?" his mother whispered back.

"That's what I don't know—and I don't know who they are."

"Hush, darling. Stand up. 'Brief life is here our portion,'" her sweet voice began, more loudly than she would have chosen, because as rector's wife she

felt it her duty to lead the singing in the absence of the choir.

After service he tried to waylay Remnant in search of further explanations, but Remnant, wearing a defiant air, was moving down the aisle in the train of Mrs. Hornblower.

"You won't think me carping," the boy heard her say, "but my pew is certainly not kept as a lady's pew ought to be."

"Beg pardon, Mrs. Hornblower," Remnant declared, stoutly, "but that pew's been swept twice since Sunday. There *can't* be dust in it. If there is it's dust I don't know anything about."

"Then it's dust you *should* know something about. I *think* you should know something about it. Will you do me the kindness to look?"

The boy backed away. On rejoining his mother he found her in conversation with Mrs. Legrand. Other people stood about the church, talking together in twos and threes. When they were gone he should get his word with Remnant.

"Mama," he whispered, when his patience was near an end, "isn't no one ever going home?"

"Hush, darling. They're coming into the house. Papa is going to read something. And so, as I was saying, I said to Miss Smedley, said I—"

"Mama, may I come in when papa reads it?"

"No, darling. Don't interrupt mama. I said to Miss Smedley, said I—"

"Oh, let him come," Mrs. Legrand broke in. "If it's what you think—well, it will be such fun. Don't you know it will?"

He thought Mrs. Legrand more adorable than ever. He looked up wistfully into her rosebud face, trying

to read there some key to the secret in the air. "Are *you* on to it, Mrs. Legrand?" he couldn't help asking, before his mother could begin again.

The bride giggled and gasped at once. "On to it? On to what? You don't think," she added, turning to his mother, with renewed laughter, "that he can be throwing dust in all our—?"

"I'm so bewildered I don't know what to think," Mrs. Grace replied. "Run along, darling, and tell Bridget we're coming."

Crossing the grass-plot, he overtook Mr. Legrand on his way to the rectory. In this tall, thin American graduate of Oxford, carefully dressed according to English clerical standards, Charlie Grace recognized a friend. He was the sort of friend into whose hand one could slip one's own and speak confidentially.

"Hello, old man," the assistant rector said, jovially, when first greetings had been exchanged. "How's business?"

"They're on to it, Mr. Legrand," the boy ventured, looking up into the ascetic face to see what the effect would be. "Remnant told me so," he faltered when he saw the young clergyman's comic look of surprise.

"Yes; so he told *me*. Regular inspiration, wasn't it? All's well that ends well; only be careful what you do another time. It mightn't work so neatly. Eh?"

This was disappointing. It put him in a worse position than before. His preoccupation in trying to find a way out of it was such that he scarcely noticed the assembling of the ladies in the drawing-room nor his father's little speech. He had all he

could do, as he stood between Mr. Legrand's long, thin, friendly knees, to puzzle out the problem as to who they were who were on to it, and what they were on. He became subconsciously aware that his father ceased to speak in his own person, and was reading from what seemed to be a letter. The fact had no significance for a little boy occupied with important matters of his own until the repetition of certain names forced his attention. Bertha and Georgie and Tommy were spoken of in connection with hats, reefers, and boots in such a way as to leave no doubt that the letter so breathlessly listened to by some twenty ladies and two men, including the reader, was from the Colorado plains.

Then, all of a sudden, the force inherent in figure of speech got in its work. Remnant's idiom explained itself as vividly as it could have been set forth in Webster. They were on to it. What else could that mean but that they were on to—? He felt himself growing scarlet from the toes upward. His knees clave together. His heart pounded. His mouth went dry. One by one the various articles in the missionary box were disposed of in terms of gratitude. The stationery, the ink, the candies, the tooth-brushes, each had its word of recognition. The little boy clung for comfort to the fact that nothing as yet had been said of Freddy Furnival's train. Perhaps the more trifling contributions would go unmentioned. But no! the train received its meed of thanks, and then . . .

He knew the minute of retribution had overtaken him. He felt it coming for some minutes in advance. The clarions of judgment seemed to be ringing when his father read on:

"'But what shall I say of the wig?'"

The wig? There was a movement of skirts among the ladies. The wig? There was no wig. Who ever heard of such a thing? A wig indeed. There must be a mistake. It was the handwriting. It must be pig or dig or something of that sort. Mrs. Legrand, who as the assistant's wife was in the secret, looked back at the ladies seated behind her for the fun of seeing their expressions. Charlie Grace was kept from absolute collapse only by the support of Mr. Legrand's sharp knees.

"Allow me," the rector said, with an air of lofty amusement. "'But what shall I say of the wig? Who among our kind friends at St. David's could have heard of the illness through which I lost my hair? It is a matter of which my wife and I rarely speak even between ourselves; and still less should I think of setting it down among our needs. To do so would have struck me as unseemly. It would have provoked derision. But, now that you have divined my requirements, I may confess that my want of a wig has been sore. That which I had when I came out to the plains was blown from my head during one of the worst of last winter's storms—a storm which overtook me as I was riding home from Proctor, some twenty miles away. Since then my position has been one of considerable discomfort, not only for lack of the material covering, but because my appearance in our improvised places of worship has been such as to excite the smiles of a people none too reverent at any time, and therefore the more prone to see the grotesque in church. While I have never blamed them, I have felt that no miracle would help me more, either for my person or

in my work, than one which would provide me with the article in question. It is surely the Lord who has put the thought of it into the heart of whatever kind friend may have sent it—for, except my wife and children, the Lord alone has known of my necessity. It has been necessity none the less keen for being ludicrous, and if I seem too prolix in my thanks it is because I can do nothing else than look on the kind donor as an inspired instrument . . .'"

"My soul and body!" was the indecorous exclamation forced from the lips of Mrs. Hornblower as the boy's rush for the door almost carried her to the carpet.

It was one of those crises in which flight is the only adequate resource, in which the only refuge safe enough is in concealment from the eyes of men. Fortunately, he knew of such a shelter in the trunk-room, at the top of the house. Many a time during the course of a stormy lifetime had he hidden himself there, in moments of special shame or indignation, for purposes of communing with his own heart or of defying fate. Now he lay down there again, in a nest between two packing-cases, with a pillow of old illustrated papers. He would have been glad to be blotted out, to leave no mark on time, no record within the memory of humankind. He didn't cry. There was nothing to cry for. The occasion was one transcending tears. Neither did he repent, since there was nothing in particular, except his own folly, to repent of. He only burned—burned all over—burned with a veritable fire of humiliation at having made himself ridiculous, at having exposed his reputation forever, in the eyes of Fanny Hornblower, on the tongue of Hattie Bright, and in

twenty ways in respect to Freddy Furnival, to association for life with so despicable an object as a wig.

When his mother found him he refused to come down to the midday dinner. He didn't want any dinner. He never wanted to eat again. He would be content to stay in his attic forever and ever. If she would only go away and leave him he would be glad to starve to death. People starved to death on desert islands; he knew that; and what could be more like a desert island than a forsaken attic at the top of a rectory in New York? It would be a desert island if nobody never, never came near him any more, and that was what he asked for.

His mother knelt down on the dusty floor beside him. "My precious, it's all right. You didn't do any harm. It was quite the other way round. You heard what the letter said—how glad Mr. Waters was to get it. We all think it's wonderful. It *is* wonderful. Of course you shouldn't have taken anything out of the Girls' Friendly chest when it didn't belong to you. But if it was God who put it into your heart, darling—"

"It wasn't. It was Remnant. He told me to dive down my hand and—"

"Well, it was wonderful. And poor Mr. Waters in such need of it! An inspired instrument was what he said. And you should have heard the rest of the letter, too, darling—how Mrs. Waters trimmed the wig up, and made it fit her husband's head, and found a way to fasten it on, just like a hair-dresser, you know, and everything. I must get papa to read it to you."

"I don't want to!" he cried, desperately. "I'm not going down to dinner, mama. I'm going to live

up here. Don't bring me nothing—nothing at all —unless," he relented—"unless there's going to be chicken-pie. Julia *said* there was going to be chicken-pie."

"There is, darling. Now get up, like a precious. Don't be foolish. Come along with mama, who loves you and can't do without you."

No tears came till they were descending the second flight of stairs. Even then it was not so much tears as a convulsive sob. He clutched at his mother's skirt and refused to go farther.

"Mama."

"What is it now, darling?"

"You won't let them call me Wiggy Grace, will you?"

"Call you—what?"

"Call me Wiggy Grace. If it was Freddy I'd call him Wiggy Furnival. But, oh, mama, don't let them! Promise me you won't let them."

"Of course I won't let them, dear. They'll never think of such a thing."

And they never did. Whether the incident made less talk than the hero of it expected, or whether it never reached the ears of Freddy Furnival and Hattie Bright—he wouldn't have so much minded gentle Fanny Hornblower—he was never twitted with his part in it. As time went on nothing but the more amusing elements of the episode remained of it. But, though the story became legendary whenever a missionary box was sent out by the ladies of St. David's Church, Charlie Grace could never be induced to tell the tale himself.

CHAPTER IV

CHARLIE GRACE could never be induced to tell the tale himself chiefly because his mother saw in it more than met the eye. It made him uncomfortable to be taken as an "inspired instrument" when he knew himself to have been only a wilful youngster. Nevertheless, the understanding that he was one day to be a clergyman grew out of this set of circumstances. It was clear to the mind of Mrs. Grace that a child so singularly chosen as an infant Samuel must be destined to a sacred calling, while to her husband his own profession appeared better than any other. The fact that he himself had made a success of it was an argument in its favor when it came to a question of his son. There was no such thing as a decision on the point either on the boy's part or that of his parents. The processes by which they came to take it for granted were imperceptible to all three minds. The nearest approach ever made to a discussion of the subject was on an occasion when the lad was nine or ten years old. His mother had begun a sentence with "When you're a clergyman, darling—"

Into this his father had thought it well to interject, "If he ever *is* one."

"Oh, but he will be," Mrs. Grace said, eagerly. "You mean to be, don't you, dear?"

The question—if it was a question—was put so

confidently that the boy could only murmur, "Yes, mama." He did "mean to be," but he would have preferred a less direct way of declaring his intentions. Even so, he knew there were loopholes through which he might have crept back and changed his mind if his mother hadn't died.

Charlie Grace was never very clear as to how she died or why she died. In after life he could not recall that she had been ill—exactly. She had been delicate. Every one said that. There was some anxiety about it. Julia had even gone so far as to throw the blame for it on him. "If it hadn't been for you, you rogue, she'd be as well as anny one. She's niver had the look o' health since you come along."

He was so sensitive to this injustice that he laid Julia's accusation before Remnant. Remnant listened judicially, his eye cocked, his head to one side.

"It isn't you, sonny," he said, at last; "it's the whole thing."

It was perhaps this summing-up which enabled Charlie Grace, years later, when he was old enough to understand, to piece together his mother's story out of all sorts of scraps, seen and heard and hinted at. It was so simple a story as to make no appeal to any heart but his own.

He saw her as the youngest child of a country lawyer who had been his father's chum at college. The two men had maintained an intermittent intercourse through years in which life had carried them to different spheres of action; but when chance took the New York divine on a holiday to the "up-state" village of Horsehair Hill something of the old friendship was renewed. Enough of it, at least, was

renewed for the seven-years widower to see much of Milly Downs, and for a few infatuated weeks to think her the companion destined to console his loneliness. It was that moment of danger to an elderly life—the season of the autumn violets—when youth seems to hold out the impossible promise of a returning spring. A month sufficed to show the reverend man his error, but before it passed the mischief was done. To the sweet girl whose life had always been too retired to be gay, and whose spirit was so gentle that it never could have been really young, the honor of kind looks, kind words, and perhaps some tenderness from a great man from a great city was overwhelming. To Charlie Grace's mind—when, as a young man, he thought it over—there were not wanting signs that his father must have been on the verge of withdrawing, perhaps with a little dismay, when he saw that withdrawal was too late.

The sequel was natural enough. It was not surprising that the man who, according to Remnant, could have had Miss Smedley and all her money—the man who was the admiration of one of the most distinguished circles in New York—should have come in for comment when he stooped in this sudden manner to gather a wayside flower. An elderly man, too, who might be considered to have outlived the days of poetry! Since his children were grown up there was really no reason why he should have married again at all; and if he chose to exercise his right in this respect—why, there was Miss Smedley and her money.

And yet when young Mrs. Grace actually came to the rectory she was very well received. That was

not to be gainsaid. If St. David's had received a shock it had that *savoir vivre* which enables well-bred people to surmount disturbances. St. David's was undoubtedly kind to Mrs. Grace. Miss Smedley, with a tact which all admitted to be perfect, showed her a special friendship, while Mrs. Hornblower was heard openly to express the intention "of forming her for her place."

The difficulty was really with Mrs. Grace herself. More than the most exacting parishioner she was convinced of her insufficiency for her new life and her husband's station. New York bewildered her; St. David's appalled her. The society into which she was thrown was so intricate, so complex. When she came to see, as by the mere process of living with her husband she *had* to come to see, that their marriage had caught him at a disadvantage, there was but one way for a soul like hers to take. Charlie Grace could look back and see her taking it; he could see her taking it through the very years when he had been clinging to her skirts and lisping at her knee. There was probably some physical or temperamental weakness, too. He was never sure about it. He never cared to go into it. He could not remember that she was ever ill. She only grew more delicate, and then more delicate. He recalled hearing Mrs. Hornblower say one day to his father:

"Mr. Rector, you won't think me interfering, but you should take Mrs. Grace away. I *think* you should take her away. If you don't I shall not answer for the consequences. She needs change and rest. She needs a great *deal* of rest."

That was in the early summer of 1880, when he was eleven years old. She went to Horsehair Hill.

She wanted to take him with her, but the doctor said "No." She was to go back to her father's house and renew her strength by becoming a girl again. He retained no very clear recollection of the sequence of happenings after that. At first she was getting better; then she was not so well; then she was able to take a drive; then she was confined to bed. News came spasmodically and inconsequently, as though there were no definite progress either up or down. In August, when his father's holiday began, he, too, went to Horsehair Hill. The boy was left in town to spend a desolate school vacation in charge of Remnant and the servants. Now and then Mrs. Furnival or Mrs. Hornblower would take him for a night or two to their places on Long Island.

Then there came a time of which all his memories were blurred. A strange farmer-uncle, the husband of a married sister of his mother's, came to fetch him from Vandiver Place. At Horsehair Hill nothing was as it had ever been before. His grandfather was mooning over the place half dazed. Uncles and aunts on the mother's side whom the boy scarcely knew were in attendance. His father rarely left his mother's bedside. When he, the boy, was admitted to the darkened room he hardly knew her. She was propped up on the pillows, and seemed neither awake nor asleep. She smiled faintly, though, and as he leaned clumsily across the bed to kiss her she tried to lift her hand and lay it on his head. It was a long minute before she spoke.

"Did Bridget get all your clean clothes from the wash, darling?"

"Yes, mama."

"That's good." It was all she had strength to say.

His father nodded toward the door, and he tiptoed from the room.

For the rest of the afternoon he was uncomfortable. The attentions of so many uncles and aunts bored him. Queer cousins turned up, looking for recognition. "Don't you know me?" was a question of which he grew tired. He could remember distinctly saying to himself that he hoped it wouldn't go on very long like that. He made no attempt to define what he meant by "it." On one point he was clear—that "it" had nothing to do with his mother. That was not his mother, that still, white form in the dim room up-stairs. He had been called to Horsehair Hill on some heartbreaking errand, the nature of which was a little vague; but his mother wasn't there.

He had the same feeling about the funeral. He remembered its taking place after an interval of a few days in which he had grown accustomed to his surroundings. He had begun to follow the daily drama at Horsehair Hill, into the interests of which he was initiated by Cousin Bob Gunnison, also eleven years of age, with whom he slept. He heard about grandpa's horse, and his two cows, and the number of hens, chickens, ducks, geese, and turkeys on the small estate. He got much valuable data, too, as to the habits and character of Stores, his grandpa's "hired man." He grew intimate with Stores, and helped him select the broilers which the presence of so many uncles and aunts made it needful to broil. Once, when a green goose which should by rights have lived another month was chosen to supplement the broilers, Stores allowed him to take the ax and cut off its head. Of all the incidents of those days at

Horsehair Hill none remained more painfully in the memory of Charlie Grace than that decapitation.

The funeral was scarcely painful at all. It was rather an occasion of solemn stir, of awesome novelty, imposing and strange, but infused with that cruelly interesting quality inherent, to the mind of eleven years, in "something going on." A great deal was going on. There was a large assembly of people in black, both men and women. Downses and Gunnisons gathered from all over the county. His father moved among them benignly, shaking every hand, calling most of the connection by name. He was noble, like a prince. No one could question his grief, and yet he did little or nothing to show it. Some of the lady cousins, indeed, thought that a trifle more in the way of demonstration might have been becoming; but the lack of it was ascribed to his being a New-Yorker and an "Episcopal." It was well known that an "Episcopal" could be formal and cold in circumstances where an "Orthodock" would give way to feeling.

It was a foregone conclusion that the ceremony would take place in the little Episcopal church; but that again was something to be borne. Most of the relatives made no secret of their preference for a "home funeral" with a eulogy. "What's a eulogy, mama?" Charlie Grace heard himself mentally asking; and a lump rose in his throat. The impossibility of putting that question brought home to him his first real sense of loss.

But it passed. As side by side with his father he followed the coffin, so shiny and new, out of the stuffy parlor, he had but little feeling that his mama was in it. His father walked with head bared and

bowed, while he could feel himself moving along sturdily and erect. In the village street he noticed the signs of sympathy, blinds down or shops closed, and was even a little proud of the effect. It showed the honor in which the Downses and Gunnisons were held; but it had nothing to do with his mother.

The Episcopal church stood slightly aloof from the village. The white steeples of the Methodist and Congregational places of worship shot straight up out of Main Street, with a conscious right to the soil. The small, inexpensive wooden building dedicated to All Saints, quite correctly Early English, with its lancet windows, and its spire jauntily rising from a tower at the conventional northwest corner, came shyly, as it were, over the hill from Dallinger Gap, to perch itself barely within the limits of a community where it was not entirely welcome. Every one knew that if there had been no summer residents at Dallinger Gap there would have been no Episcopal church at Horsehair Hill—a circumstance which was said, in the language of people who chose their words, to have "created feeling."

To reach All Saints the little procession turned out of Main Street to follow a lane all purple and yellow with Michaelmas daisies and goldenrod. A few children picking blackberries paused in their task to look. A cow came half-way across a meadow to gaze over a fence in a dumb, pitiful stare. A mare nosing her foal glanced backward with eyes timid and wondering. Otherwise the little procession wound its way up the hill through a shrill summer stillness.

At the church door there was the usual poignant

delay. Black-coated men drew the coffin with an oily ease out of the long hearse. Father and son began to follow it up the steps.

"I am the Resurrection and the Life, saith the Lord. He that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live. And whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die."

The boy slipped his hand into his father's. The voice coming out of the empty church had the effect of that mysterious call which his mother seemed to have heard and followed. She was following it now—in—in—forward—forward—while they pressed along behind.

He was startled, overawed. This, then, *had* something to do with her. After all, she was there, in that long, shiny box with the tawdry handles, and the flowers on top. She must be, for his father was crying—that is, he was blinking his eyes and wrinkling his forehead in an effort to check more tears than the two already coursing down his cheeks. The boy himself had no inclination to cry. He was too much concerned with the Voice, which continued to roll on with a haunting solemnity:

"Lord, Thou hast been our refuge from one generation to another. Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever the earth and the world were made, Thou art God from everlasting and world without end. Thou turnest man to destruction; again Thou sayest, Come again, ye children of men."

He could follow the words the more easily because they were tolerably familiar. He was a choir-boy in these years and sang them in church. He had never thought of their meaning, nor did he think

of it now; but they rolled over him with a power of sonority, immensity, eternity, like the sound of the sea or peals from an organ.

Then it was like an anthem, an anthem such as he had never heard and yet could imagine.

"Now is Christ risen from the dead and become the first-fruits of them that slept. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive."

He still had no inclination to cry. He sat with his hands—on which one of his aunts had pulled a pair of black cotton gloves—folded in his lap, and his feet, which now reached to the floor, kicking a hassock nervously. His head being slightly thrown back, the long, pointed chin, inherited from his mother, had the mystic, yearning expression with which the shifting of an angle could endue it. Over the altar was a stained-glass Good Shepherd all out of proportion, carrying on his shoulder a sheep that looked like a rabbit. He traced the outlines of the rabbit with his eye, while with his ear he followed the onward sweep of the apostolic strain:

"For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory."

"Death is swallowed up in victory. Death is swallowed up in victory. Death is swallowed up in victory."

His repetition of the words was purely mechanical.

It was but the haunting of a phrase too heavily laden with prophecy to be easily comprehensible. It had not more definiteness of meaning to him than any of the utterances of Job, Moses, or Jesus Christ, which had just been sweeping across his soul. "Death is swallowed up in victory." He discovered that by repeating it in a certain way it had a sound like the booming of cannon—or was it the ringing of bells? It had a throb and a measure to it, too. One could walk to it. One could walk to it like a soldier or a priest or a mourner. His uncle Frank might have walked to it when he marched toward Gettysburg; his father was walking to it now as they went down the aisle; he himself was walking to it, down the aisle, out into the daylight, and along the churchyard path to where a little mound of earth marked their goal.

But he found himself unable to listen here as he had listened in the church. There was too much to observe. There was the placing of the coffin on the bars across the open grave. There was the grave itself, so narrow and deep. There was the clergyman in his white surplice, looking out of keeping with green trees and the open air. Lastly, there was Uncle Frank's headstone, beside which the new grave had been made. He read the inscription once or twice. He liked reading it. For reasons he could not fathom it appealed to him. "Francis Gunnison Downs, who, at Gettysburg, gave his life for his country and his soul to God. Aged 23. *Give peace in our time, O Lord.*" He liked that. It was terse and manly. If he were ever to die, which seemed improbable, he would be glad of something of the sort over him.

And then suddenly he found himself clutching his father's arm and calling out wildly: "Papa! Oh, don't let them!"

They had pulled away the crosspieces, and with a wriggling, irregular motion the coffin was going down.

Except for that one irrepressible cry he controlled himself. He knew the coffin *must* go down, that it must lie there and be covered up. He was a big boy now, and must have "sense." He did his best to attain to "sense," pressing his palm tightly over his mouth and keeping back the sobs while the earth was shoveled in.

It was only when they turned away from the grave, he and his father side by side, that the feeling returned to him again that they were not leaving his mama behind them.

CHAPTER V

ON the way back to New York that afternoon Charlie Grace had his first feeling of responsibility. It came to him quite naturally as, seated in the train, he noticed his father's bowed back and bent head. He had no sense of a charge being laid upon him or of a burden to be taken up; he merely said to himself, "I must be company for papa." It never occurred to him before that a day might come when his father would look to him as he had hitherto looked to his father, nor could it be said to have occurred to him now; but, sitting in the red-plush seat, his eye roving from the green wooded banks of the Hudson on the left to the big, brooding figure on the right, he felt in a dim way that the relative positions of father and son had begun to change.

After supper that evening he carried his lesson-books boldly into the study, as he had never done before, saying:

"May I sit here, papa?"

There was that in his tone which took the answer for granted. He knew it must be a comfort for his father to have him near, even though the latter only said: "Certainly, my boy. Come in whenever you feel lonely." Making himself snug in an arm-chair near a good light, he pretended to be studying while he watched his father sort the letters that had

piled up for him during the latter days of his absence.

As the rector of an important city parish Dr. Grace took his correspondence seriously. He liked it to be large; he liked the sense of importance he got from being written to on a wide variety of subjects. Just now his letters were chiefly those of sympathy on his recent bereavement, but it was a consolation in itself to note the extensiveness of the circle, both clerical and secular, from which they came.

Following his father's preoccupation, the boy made the reflection—with a swallowed sob—that it was still possible for life to go on. Even here in this empty house, where there was no light in the big front bedroom, and no rustle of skirts on the stair, and no sweet voice to say at nine o'clock, "Now, Charlie, dear, it's time to go to bed"—even here life could go on. In the halls and the study there was a faint odor of boiling fruit and sugar, announcing the fact that at the very moment when the little black procession had been creeping up to the churchyard at Horsehair Hill Julia had been making raspberry jam.

Though he was aware that raspberry jam would be appreciated during the winter, this callousness revolted him. He got up and began moving restlessly about the room. Because he grew suddenly conscious of a yearning in every nerve and an aching in every limb, he thrust his hands nonchalantly into his trousers pockets and began to inspect the framed photographs of St. Paul's Cathedral and the High Street at Oxford, hanging on the walls, as if he had never seen them before. It was a relief to find his father too deeply engrossed in his letters of con-

dolence to notice him. It enabled him to slip unperceived up-stairs to his mother's room, where, the blinds being raised, there was light enough from the street-lamp on the other side of the greensward to enable him to move about.

The place was oddly full of her presence. He could almost see her sitting in her arm-chair by the fireplace. He went to it, hanging over the back lovingly. He crept about the room, fingering the things she had been accustomed to use—a pin-cushion, a hair-brush, the pens and pencils on her desk. He smoothed her pillow and pressed his cheek down into its cool softness. He opened the door of the big closet in which her dresses were still hanging, and, gathering an armful of them to his breast, he kissed them passionately. He drew in long breaths, getting, so it seemed to him, the very smell of her person—a clean, dry, country smell like that of new-mown hay. Rising sobs sent him down-stairs again.

"Very gratifying, all this sympathy," his father said, as the boy re-entered the study. "The bishop is especially kind—and the more so in that he and I haven't always seen eye to eye. I shall keep these letters for you, my boy. You'll appreciate them when you're older."

"Papa, what does 'Death is swallowed up in victory' mean?"

He stood questioningly before his father's desk. Dr. Grace lifted his fine brows with that movement which left the eyes still concealed beneath their heavy lids. He arranged his letters in little piles. When he spoke he brought out his sentences with an oratorical rotundity suggesting the repetition of phrases from old sermons.

"It's the expression of an inspiration which comes out of the very earliest yearnings of mankind. The writer of the Book of Genesis probably had it in mind when he spoke of a Tree in the midst of the Garden—that is, a force in the midst of earthly existence—which could make for immortality. Even the Greeks had some intimation—a presentiment, one might say—of the same thing, as we can read in their legends of Alcestis, of Eurydice, and of Laodamia. I know, too, of few finer passages in literature than that in the *Phaedo* of Plato, in which Socrates argues that death may be the greatest of all good things to men. In the life and death and resurrection of Jesus Christ the Apostles naturally saw these hopes and longings fulfilled—saw life and immortality brought to light by the Gospel, as St. Paul says—and so drew the conclusion they expressed with so much ecstasy in the cry—an echo of the prophet Isaiah—that death had been swallowed up in victory. Do you understand?"

The boy hesitated. "I understand some of it, papa—I think."

"Some of it is all you can be expected to understand now. The rest will come when you're older." Feeling himself dismissed, he went back to his book with a little sigh. The haunting phrase had become curiously disappointing when historically explained. He hoped it might have had some bearing on what had happened to his mother, but apparently it had none—or very little.

His father broke in on these thoughts with the observation: "Here's a letter from your sister Emma. She had just received the sad news, and writes very feelingly. She says, too, that she may

be able to make us a little visit before the winter. You'd like that, wouldn't you, my boy?"

He answered, dutifully, "Yes, papa," but in reality the prospect of a visit from this grown-up married sister whom he had never seen stirred in him all sorts of jealousies on behalf of his mama. He knew well enough that if his mama hadn't died his sister would not have come; and, while he owned to some curiosity with regard to the person of one so nearly related to himself, he resented a sympathy that took this form. He was a little indignant that his father should not resent it, too, though he had long ago seen by intuition that the latter, inwardly at least, justified the children of his first wife in their stand toward his second. It was as if he admitted that in marrying again he had wronged them.

"Is Mr. Tomlinson coming, too?" he felt moved to ask.

The rector answered absently, while running his eye over another letter: "Osborne will come if he gets back in time from Canada. He's been exploring in the new regions they seem to be opening up in their northwest. Emma writes that he's interested in this railway business they're exploiting there. Rather a wild scheme, it seems to me. Yes, he hopes to come, and they will bring Sophy, too. You'll like that, won't you?"

He said "Yes, papa" with the same air of dutiful assent.

"They want to find a school for Sophy in New York," the father continued, still scanning his letters. "I shall suggest St. Margaret's. Hilda Penrhyn is there, and Mrs. Penrhyn finds it very satisfactory. There's a distant relationship between

Mrs. Penrhyn and Osborne Tomlinson which will make it pleasant for the two girls. I want you to know the Penrhyns some day. You'll find them useful acquaintances when you're older. Very distinguished family. No better blood in New York."

His heart swelled again. It was as if a lot of new people were entering on the scene just because his mama had left it. They would fill up her place so that even her memory would be crowded out. She had been buried only that afternoon, and yet his father was looking forward with pleasant anticipation to a future with people who were strangers to her. He wondered if grown-up men could feel grief with the desolating intensity of boys of eleven. Perhaps they couldn't. It was doubtless sheer incapacity for sorrow that enabled his father to give himself to his letters and the prospect of Emma's return home with a preoccupation he himself couldn't bring to bear on the third Latin declension. Having been charged to master it during the summer, he had tackled it to-night purely because he recalled an occasion when his mama had told him not to forget it; but it was study only in name. Problems of life and death rendered grammar even duller than it had a right to be.

He rose when the clock struck nine. It was what his mama would have reminded him to do had she been there. With some awkwardness he approached the desk, which stood in the middle of the room, to say good night. His father had begun to write—probably to acknowledge the more important of his letters of condolence. The boy could read the words "My dear Bishop" as he followed the tracings of the pen upside down.

For some obscure reason he felt that this prompt response to sympathy buried his mother deeper. It forced home on him that sense of loss against which he had been fighting for the last four days. He was shocked to hear himself saying, in a voice sharp with rising tears:

"Papa, you're sorry mama is dead, aren't you?"

Fortunately, the father saw in the question no imputation of callousness. He stretched out his right arm, and the boy slid round the corner of the desk to take refuge within its embrace.

"We're both sorry," the widower said, gently. "You must always remember your dear mother, my boy, and try to do all she ever told you."

"I will, papa," he sobbed; "I promise you I will."

He took this engagement so seriously that when, one day in the autumn, Freddy Furnival said, suddenly, "I'm going to be a doctor; what are you going to be?" Charlie Grace took his courage in both hands and replied, "I'm going to be a minister."

Though he was aware of difficulties in making this confession to one who knew him so intimately as Furny, he was not prepared for the mingled laughter and amazement in the latter's honest freckled face, nor for the incredulity of his response: "*You! A minister!*"

Charlie Grace could only toss his head, his hands thrust into his trousers pockets, and say, defiantly: "Well? What of it?"

"You're not good enough," was the natural retort.

"Well, I guess I can *be* good enough."

"I guess you can't."

Thus contradicted, the lad was silent. He pretended to be inspecting the long gaunt arms of the

incipient Brooklyn Bridge, reaching toward each other from the opposite shores of the East River, but in reality he was delving in his mind for an explanation of his shyness in acknowledging the profession to which he meant to give himself. In Furny's presence, at any rate, he would rather have said that he wanted to be a lawyer or a doctor or a man of business. It required a strong appeal to his mother's memory to keep him stanch to his purpose, and yet he wondered why.

They turned away from the spectacle of the giant Bridge to take the Elevated back in the direction of Vandiver Place. A trip on the Elevated was still novel enough to be an economical outing to schoolboys in search of adventure. Charlie Grace reverted to the topic he had at heart while they were climbing the stairs into the station.

"Anyhow, I don't have to be good for a long time yet. You can't be a minister till you're over twenty."

"That doesn't make any difference," Furny sniffed.

"A doctor has to be good, too," Charlie Grace argued.

"But he hasn't got to be better than other people. My old man's a doctor, so I know. But if a minister isn't better than other people, what's the good of him?"

"You'll find that out."

The assertion expressed Charlie Grace's defiance of Freddy Furnival's opinion. It implied that he, Charlie Grace, might be wounded by that opinion, might even suffer from it, but in so far as it was a criticism on himself it could only make him the more dogged in his intentions. It was the kind of

thing that put him on his mettle, whatever he might feel inside.

This effect was confirmed when a week or two later he walked home from Sunday-school with Hattie Bright. He did this now and then, partly because he was vaguely aware that his father disliked it without venturing to say so, and partly for the pleasure of the young lady's conversation. Freddy Furnival indulged in the same bit of gallantry in direct opposition to parental commands. To both young men, as to others in Vandiver Place, the knowledge that Miss Bright was regarded by their elders as the apple in Eden added zest to her company. Not that her society needed this charm to give it spice, for already, at the age of twelve, Hattie Bright, with her demure manner and long, soft, slanting regard, was, in a measure, mistress of the arts that captivate. No little girl ever went out of church more properly nor, with her prayer-book and hymn-book in her hand, walked up the wide pavement of Vandiver Place toward the turning into the unattractive street in which her mother kept a boarding-house with less apparent thought of being accompanied, or even followed by a glance, and yet no poor child ever drew attention to herself more prophetically. "Now, Freddy, dear, go right home," Mrs. Furnival would order, perhaps with no clear idea of why she became suddenly so strict, while Mrs. Hornblower would oblige Reginald to climb into the barouche beside her, telling the coachman to drive off in the direction contrary to that which the little minx was taking, though Fifth Avenue lay that way.

After Sunday-school there was, however, less sur-

veillance, and young gentlemen, free of the oversight of their mamas, would find themselves, in the most natural way in the world, strolling beside Hattie Bright as they might stroll beside anybody else. On this particular afternoon she conversed genteelly with Charlie Grace on the respective merits of spelling and geography as studies till they were well out of Vandiver Place. The binding of the copy of *The Dove in the Eagle's Nest* she had taken from the Sunday-school library made a spot of olive-green and gold against the scarlet of her autumn dress. It was quite without provocation that, shooting at him a sidelong glance from her soft, mischievous eyes, she said:

"*I* heard something about *you*." The tone was meant to rouse curiosity.

"What is it?"

"I'm not going to tell."

"That's mean," he declared.

"No, it isn't. I said I wouldn't."

"Then you shouldn't say anything about it."

"I can say something about it so long as I don't tell you what it is. Anyhow, I'm going to."

The boy reflected. "Who told you?" he asked, at last.

The tip of a teasing little tongue became visible between two cherry lips. "Shouldn't you like to know?"

"I do know. It was Reggie Hornblower. *I* saw him—running over and whispering something to you when Miss Smedley wasn't looking."

Miss Bright tossed her head. "You're quite mistaken. It wasn't him at all."

"Well, then, it was Furny."

"That's just like you. You think everything has to be Furny."

"Anyhow," he swaggered, "I don't care. My sister Emma is coming home. She may arrive any day now. My old man says so."

Miss Bright preferred to keep to the original topic. She allowed some minutes to pass in silence before saying:

"It's about what you're going to be."

As though some shameful secret were being dragged to light, the boy felt himself reddening all over. For the moment his imagination was too busy avenging this betrayal on Furny's head to allow of his finding anything to say. Hattie Bright could, therefore, continue, with the same taunting display of the tip of her sharp little tongue.

"I heard you were going to be a minister."

The incongruity between any such career and Charlie Grace seemed to get emphasis from the rich color in her cheeks and the roguery in her eyes. She was the Scarlet Woman in miniature. It required no small amount of moral courage to enable the boy to brace himself and say:

"Well, so I am."

"You're *not!*"

This repetition of Furny's incredulity would have been harder to bear had it not been for the obstinate element in the boy's character. "You'll see," he replied, holding his head proudly.

Hattie Bright covered her mouth with *The Dove in the Eagle's Nest* in order to call attention to the fact that she was smothering her laughter. She controlled herself at intervals, only to burst out with a renewed "Pf-f!" of suppressed merriment, bringing the book

again into use, while she charged him with her eyes.

He walked along uneasily. "I don't see anything so funny in it," he protested. "My old man is a minister, and *he's* all right."

"Pf-f!" was the only answer, while once more *The Dove in the Eagle's Nest* hid all but the little Scarlet Woman's glances.

On the way homeward his heart burned within him, not so much from a feeling of affront as because his friends thought scorn of a project dear to his mama. While Hattie Bright had not made the charge in so many words, it was obvious that she thought him, as Freddy Furnival had thought him, "not good enough." He meditated a little on the standard of goodness required. He ran over the list of the different clergymen he knew, including his papa. It occurred to him that he couldn't have put goodness pure and simple as the leading characteristic of any one of them—unless he made an exception of Mr. Legrand. A good many of them came to the house in the course of a year. He knew them as a jolly, kindly lot of men, who smoked a great deal and told amusing stories and enjoyed them. Undoubtedly they were "good," and yet with no such ideal of sanctity as to make him despair of ever reaching it. Even his papa had lapses—chiefly in matters of temper—from the highest conceptions of merit, for which the boy himself had all his life been accustomed to make allowances. Mr. Legrand was different. He could not have explained wherein the difference lay, but he was aware of a quality in the assistant at St. David's which gave him a standing of his own in their little world. He had

heard his father speak of it, too, sometimes with a touch of impatience.

And yet it was this singularity, whatever it consisted in, that emboldened the boy to bring his difficulties before the tall young ecclesiastic.

"Mr. Legrand, do you have to be very good to be a clergyman. I suppose you do."

They were walking up Vandiver Place in the direction of the rectory late one November afternoon. Though there was still a dusky glimmer in the western sky, the street-lamps were lit, and a silvery crescent moon hung above the spire of St. David's. Charlie Grace was on his way home from choir practice. The yearning refrain of a medieval melody which, in view of the approaching Advent season, he had just been rehearsing, kept humming in his memory:

> Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
> Shall come to thee, O Israel!

When, through the influence of Rufus Legrand, and somewhat to the irritation of the rector, St. David's suppressed its famous quartette in favor of a surpliced choir, it had been found necessary to rent a small hall in a neighboring street for the boys to practise in. It was from this hall that the boy was now on his way home, whistling the "Veni, Emmanuel" under his breath, when at the turning into Vandiver Place he ran across Mr. Legrand.

During the six or seven years in which the latter had been assistant at St. David's there had sprung up between the two the same sort of matter-of-fact intimacy, on another plane, as existed between Charlie Grace and Remnant. They came closer

together in proportion as the boy grew up and Legrand himself, in the rough-and-tumble of parochial life in New York, lost something of the spick-and-span habits acquired at Oxford and Cuddesdon. Even Charlie Grace, catching sight of the tall, spare figure in the lamplight, could discern in the carelessly hanging clerical jacket and the battered round felt hat a falling away from former standards of perfection. He knew, too, that Mrs. Legrand complained more in earnest than in fun of her husband's indifference to social requirements, of his zeal for working among the poor, and of his dislike of making calls in Fifth Avenue. He had once heard her declare with tears in her eyes that, after thinking she had married not a clergyman but a man, she found she had only got a clergyman.

In response to the boy Legrand said nothing for a minute or two. "It isn't, in the first place, a question of goodness at all," he answered then. "No one becomes a clergyman because he's good."

"What does he do it for, then?" the lad asked, in astonishment.

Legrand reflected again. "Primarily, because he's willing to be used as an instrument in a great cause —in a large movement. Before anything else it's a question of willingness."

"Could he be used as an instrument in a great cause if he wasn't good?"

"He couldn't be as good an instrument, of course; but I fancy he could be used. From what we know about God we infer that He can turn any means to account. Do you remember the queer story of Balaam's ass?"

The boy nodded.

"Well, don't you think that that may be what we're to learn from it?—that what we consider a very feeble and inferior thing can become the medium of God's power?"

"And you don't *have* to be good to be a minister?"

"I must repeat what I said—that it's chiefly a question of willingness. If any one is eager to serve—a minister, you know, is only a servant—it will generally be found that other things adjust themselves. The desire to serve comes first."

At the rectory door they said good night, and Charlie Grace went in. He was quite clear in his mind as he said to himself: "That wouldn't be my reason—not the desire to serve—it wouldn't be. I should do it because mama wanted me to. But there couldn't be a better reason than that."

Nevertheless, it was a relief to know that "goodness" was no terrifying essential. As he hung up his cap and overcoat and went toward the kitchen to ask Julia what there was to be for supper he shrilled again the medieval refrain:

Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel!

It was the first time there had been such happy singing in the house since his mother died.

CHAPTER VI

OF his sister's visit to New York only two isolated details remained permanently in Charlie Grace's memory.

He recalled, in the first place, hearing strange voices in the study on coming home from school one day early in December. The words that caught his attention, as he threw down his satchel of books on an old sofa in the hall, were:

"Going into the Church? How nice!"

The voice was noticeably rich and caressing. He decided to listen, as he often did when there were callers in the house, waiting for a hint to tell him whether to go in or run away. Creeping down the hall, he peeped warily into the room. His father was in his favorite arm-chair near the grate, in which a coal-fire was glowing. A short, plump lady sat beside him, a hand laid familiarly on the arm of his chair. Her back being toward the door, the boy got no glimpse of her features, but without exposing himself to view he could look squarely into the face of a stocky, thick-necked man, with a face like that of a bulldog, whom he knew from photographs to be Osborne Tomlinson. He inferred that Sophy must have been deposited at St. Margaret's School at Tubb's Ferry, on the Hudson, before her parents had entered New York.

"It was something his dear mother had very

much at heart," the rector said, almost apologetically.

"Then of course you couldn't think of his doing anything else—*of course*."

The lady's tone implied that all sorts of objections that might have been raised were thus overruled.

"The West is offering wonderful opportunities for young men just now," said the stocky man, in a hoarse, barking voice. "Will do it for some time to come, though it won't go on forever. Remarkable country up in the new regions of Canada."

"I've looked at Butler's book—*The Great Lone Land*," the rector said, by way of being up to the level of the conversation.

"Won't be a great lone land very long. Not many of us are in the secret yet, but those of us who are know that the foundations of some big fortunes will be laid there during the next twenty years. Very short-sighted policy on the part of our government not to work up a plan by which we might get possession of that territory. Ought to do it, and do it mighty quick. D'ye see? England doesn't know yet what she's got, nor Canada, either. It will be another generation before they jump to it. If in the mean time we were to put up a claim and push it hard enough I believe in the long run we'd make it good."

"There's such a thing as international righteousness, Osborne."

There was a short harsh laugh. "Is there? Never heard of it. At least, I've never seen it—nor anybody else."

"Oh, Noddy is a regular bucaneer," the lady explained. "He's perfectly Elizabethan, Noddy is. It's no use saying he isn't, because he is. Three

centuries ago he would have been a Drake or a Frobisher instead of a civil engineer."

Mr. Tomlinson accepted the compliment with another laugh. "Some one's got to go ahead and do the pioneering. If we were all stay-at-homes, like father Grace here, there'd never be any discoveries. As it is, we've got hold of a big thing. The trouble 'll be in making people believe it. When I say people, I mean our people. I want the United States to have a hand in this business. That's what I'm after in New York. I want to interest some of our financial bigwigs—men like Silas Hornblower, for instance—in the Trans-Canadian."

"But the newspapers say the whole thing is going to smash."

"Not by a long shot, father Grace. The newspapers be hanged! It's like many another dream too big for the average imagination to take in; it will seem an impossibility till it's done. And it's going to *be* done; you can bet your life on that."

The boy thrilled at the words. He liked this big way of talking. He liked, too, the sweeping outlook over prairies and lakes, over rivers and mountains, brought before the mind's eye as his brother-in-law went on to describe the newly explored lands. Explored? Yes; they had been explored; and yet, as far as that went, they still remained an undiscovered country right at the doors of the United States. It was hard to get any one to believe that a region so far in the north could be as fertile as the Garden of Eden. The Indians had a name, now restricted to one relatively small province—Manitoba, God's Meadow—which gave quite the most graphic conception of the whole vast, flowery plain, dotted

with lakes and drained by rivers, lying between Lake Superior and the Rockies. And when you reached the Rockies! Great God Almighty! Talk about Switzerland! If Switzerland were the size of the German Empire, and painted with the colors of Egypt and the Riviera and the Dolomites combined, and rich with the richness of California and France, then Switzerland might be comparable to the country stretching from the Selkirks to the Pacific Ocean. D'ye see? But people wouldn't believe it. There was the rub. When he said people he meant people with money, people who could supply the few millions so desperately needed to push the Trans-Canadian from coast to coast. Even a few thousands, for the matter of that! If father Grace had a little cash to spare it was giving him a tip that would mean wealth to advise investing it in a cause that was one of philanthropy almost as much as of finance. He, Tomlinson, had banked his all on it, and some ten or a dozen others—Scotchmen, Americans, Canadians, but Scotchmen in particular—who were equal to the vision had done the same. It meant comparative poverty for a few years, and then . . . !

The boy thrilled again. He wanted his papa to be rich, for his papa's own sake. He had got the idea of late that money was scarcer than it used to be in the rectory, where it had never been abundant. He had heard whispers that the income of St. David's was falling off, largely because of a tendency on the part of the parishioners to move farther up-town and to attend St. Bartholomew's or St. Thomas's. He knew there had been arrears of late in the monthly instalments of his father's stipend

—a thing that had never been known in the old days—and he gathered that there was to be a hurried but rather belated movement to guard against further calamity by raising an endowment. He had even gone to the pains of asking Remnant what an endowment meant—getting the information that it was a fund to enable the rector and himself, Remnant, to snap their fingers at all the bosses in New York, and to get their pay whether any one came to church or not. Remnant was all for an endowment, and so was Charlie Grace, till now that his brother-in-law's offer promised a more effective relief. He was disappointed, therefore, to hear his father say, perhaps with some bitterness:

"I'm afraid you're looking to the wrong quarter, Osborne. I've never been able to save more than a few hundred dollars in my life. It's been no easy matter to keep up a position like mine on four thousand dollars a year, which is the highest point my salary has ever touched. And now, even that—"

The rector broke off with a sigh. The boy sighed, too. His father's words confirmed half-formed suspicions to which he had never yielded. They inspired also an immense desire to be rich himself, to be safe from the kind of anxiety he had always felt hanging over the household, to shelter his father from it, too. It was a second disappointment that brother-in-law Tomlinson should not press his point. He gave in rather weakly, saying merely:

"Oh, well, I'm only telling you. It's a chance that won't come again. D'ye see?"

Charlie Grace's second recollection was of a few words exchanged with Emma as he came home with

her from church one Sunday morning after Mr. Tomlinson had finished his business in New York and gone to carry his message to other cities of the Union. Up to this time Emma had stayed with her husband at the Fifth Avenue Hotel, but now she took up her abode at the rectory with her father. To Remnant and Julia she became again Miss Emma, a personage they had been accustomed to love and fear.

Remnant in particular was emphatic in his admiration. "There, sonny," he observed to Charlie Grace, "is a woman for you. Talk about Mrs. Hornblower—she's a boss; Miss Emma's a general. A man 'll kick against the one, when he'll be proud to serve under the other."

The boy himself acknowledged by this time the justice of Remnant's analysis. Beginning with some prejudice against Emma, chiefly on his mother's behalf, he was compelled to admit that she made a pleasant addition to the family. "Seems as if she'd always been here," was the confidence he made in return for Remnant's enthusiasm.

Remnant shook his head. "Pity she couldn't stay, sonny. St. David's 'u'd be another kind o' church with her on deck. She'd soon put a stop to this here work of Parson Legrand bringing in all the tagrag-and-bobtail the way he is. I don't hold with Parson Legrand nohow. I tell you, there's people I have to show into seats on a Sunday that I wouldn't want to sweep out with a broom. I'd take a pitchfork to 'em. And yet there I am, having to look at them polite and make 'em think they're welcome or else lose my job. Religion is a holler thing, sonny. If ever you're a sexton you'll find it out. And I

partly blame your pa. He's too good. He don't put his foot down severe enough on this here Parson Legrand and make him keep the church respectable, like what it used to be. Now, there's Mrs. Legrand. She's another thing. Me and she has wept tears together, like, to see the low crowd *he'll* get in. Sometimes I think he ain't in his proper senses. Well, anyhow, we've got Miss Emma back, and I hope she'll settle him. I call it a pity to see religion going to pieces when there's been as much money put into it as there has here."

It was natural that approval from such an authoritative quarter should have its effect on Charlie Grace. In a very short time he found himself giving Emma her due. She, on her part, treated him with distinguished consideration, taking an interest in all that concerned him and giving an attention to his private affairs, his boots and his clothes, the brushing of his teeth and the cleaning of his nails, such as they had not received since his mother died. He made no inward objection, therefore, when, as they crossed the greensward from Amiens Cathedral that Sunday morning, Emma said, in her warm contralto:

"So you're going into the Church?"

He answered, timidly, "I—I was thinking of it."

"It's a lovely career," Emma said, with gentle heartiness. His soul leaped within him. To be supported by one so strong would in itself be strength. A minute went by before she said again: "It's a lovely career—for any one who can make the sacrifice."

He felt a sudden spiritual drop. He knew what she meant. Nevertheless, he made bold to say:

"What kind of sacrifice?"

"Well, money sacrifice, in the first place. And, of course, that entails the sacrifice of freedom and power and self-respect. No one who's poor can be really self-respecting. It's no use saying he can be, because he can't. His time is fully taken up with respecting those who are rich and doing what they tell him. It's a beautiful thing in its way—for those who have the meekness to accept the rôle."

"Lots of people are poor," he ventured, "who aren't clergymen at all."

"That's true. They're poor because they can't help it. But in a good many cases a clergyman is poor when he *could* help it. That is, he needn't have been a clergyman. There's very little doubt that if papa had been a lawyer or a man of business he would have been rich. Do you see?"

He pondered. "If I were a lawyer or a man of business should I be rich?"

"I can't say that, you know. But you'd have a chance. A clergyman has no chance. That's all I mean. He decides to abandon the chance when he chooses to be a clergyman. He takes a very high stand—if he can keep up to it."

That was some comfort, at least. A high stand was what his mama would have approved of. He was sure of that.

"She wanted it—mama did," he faltered.

"And that's a reason in itself, isn't it? That's what I want you to see. It isn't as if you were choosing this career just because you like it, is it? In a way it's chosen for you. Of course, it will keep you from doing what other boys do—and later on from doing what other young men do. Clergymen,

and people who are going to be clergymen, are always so restricted. Everybody's shocked if they're not. But *you* wouldn't mind all that, would you, dear? You'd simply decide to—to give up, so to speak, from the start. Once you'd really decided, it wouldn't be so terrible, would it?"

He tried to come up to the expectations implied in her tone by saying "No," but his tongue clave to the roof of his mouth. He could only appeal once more to the capacity for dogged determination he knew to be within him. He would have despised himself less for a downright meanness than for being frightened away from fulfilling his mother's wish just because it was going to be hard. It was kind of Emma to warn him, but he felt himself fortified in advance.

They had reached the door of the rectory when Emma made a new move. "Are there never any more people in church than there were to-day?"

This was something he had never thought of noticing. He said, "I don't think so," purely from inadvertence.

"Then the congregation must be falling off."

He would probably not have thought of his remark again if that night at supper, after the evening service, Emma hadn't said to her father:

"The congregation keeps up pretty well, don't you think?"

The rector fell into her little trap. "H'm. Ye-es. Considering."

"You mean, considering—"

"How people are moving away. Do you notice how many houses in the neighborhood are to let? Business creeping in, too. I must confess, however, I don't dread business so much as the boarding-

house. There are two already in Vandiver Place, and I hear the Pemberton house is likely to make a third. That to me is perfectly appalling."

"I did notice," Emma said, gently, "that the complexion of the congregation seemed—well, rather changed."

"Oh, that's Legrand's work, and it worries me. It's something I hardly know what to do about. It isn't that the poor aren't welcome in God's house. Not at all. Of course, you know it couldn't be that. Only we've provided the Mission Chapel on purpose. I fail to see what's to be gained by mixing people up, when all experience shows they get along better apart. He's very radical, Legrand is. It is all the more surprising, too, when you think of the family he comes from. I supposed that in getting him at St. David's we'd secured a man who'd—who'd continue the traditions. But I'm disappointed in Legrand that way. Not that he isn't a worthy fellow. He is—a perfect saint, of his kind—but it's not what I've tried to make the ideal of St. David's."

"It seems to me there's a great deal of democratic feeling in the church of late years."

"Quite so, quite so. And it doesn't do. It's what I've tried to impress upon Legrand. Democratic feeling, I tell him, is all very well, but you've got to take the American people as you find them; and with the American people it's been proved over and over again that where the poorer sort come in the better families will move away. You may regret it, but so it is. There's a sense in which they're more aristocratic than any Europeans. Every one knows that. Where the lower classes come the

upper classes go; it's a law of the American temperament; and that's what I tell Legrand."

The rector spoke with animation. One could see it was a subject on which he had reflected. Emma was sufficiently of his opinion to say:

"Since the character of Vandiver Place is changing and likely to change more, wouldn't it be a good idea, father, when another bishopric is offered you—"

She stopped, because the rector, who was helping himself to cold veal-and-ham pie, paused in the act and lifted his eyes on her rather piteously. The boy was not sure that he had ever seen this particular look in his eyes before. It led him to say to himself: "Perhaps papa thinks they won't offer him any more bishoprics."

It was possible that Emma perceived something of the same sort, for she hastened to say:

"Naturally, after you've declined Southern Arizona and the missionary diocese of Mesaba—wasn't it—they may think you don't want—"

"My dear," the father said, wistfully, "I'm sixty-three years of age, and they look for bishops now among the young and vigorous. For that sort of thing I'm"—he swallowed hard—"I'm out of the running. I'm out of the running for anything you may call promotion. For a rector of St. David's there *is* no promotion but a bishopric—and now they consider me too old. I'm not; but it's the impression that has got about. No, my dear," he added, with lofty calmness, "we will not cherish illusions or vain hopes. As rector of St. David's I've lived for twenty-seven years, and as rector of St. David's —*now*—I shall die."

Emma had the tact to smile, and to say, briskly, "Well, that's pretty good as it is," after which she turned the conversation on the school at Tubb's Ferry.

But the consciousness of failure in his father's tone did not escape the boy. It surprised him, too, since he had always supposed that, whatever limitations his parent was subjected to, he could command anything he liked in the way of churchly honors. It was painful to think of one so Olympian as the victim of hopes blasted and ambitions unfulfilled.

Charlie Grace could bear his own troubles and fight his own fights, he could endure to look upon his soul as a seething-pot of sin and a hotbed of incipient adolescent vices, but he hated to think that his papa couldn't have any bishopric he wanted or should have to consider himself the object of humiliation or ill luck. It roused his instincts of championship, of protection. He wanted to be powerful—to be in a position to defy or command. As he went on munching his veal-and-ham pie, while Emma and her father talked of the advantages that would accrue to Sophy from daily association with Hilda Penrhyn, the boy fell to wondering whether or not, if he gave up the idea of being a clergyman and started out frankly to make money, like Noddy Tomlinson, he could be of more help to his papa.

CHAPTER VII

THIS question raised itself at intervals throughout the next three or four years, coming up chiefly during Emma's visits to the rectory. Osborne's efforts on behalf of the Trans-Canadian keeping him on the move over the United States and Canada, with frequent dashes to London, Paris, or Berlin, his wife rarely had a settled home. It was a matter of convenience to her, therefore, to spend a large portion of her time in New York.

Notwithstanding Emma's methods of attack Charlie Grace kept to his resolution. Not that he didn't sometimes reconsider it; but reconsideration never failed to bring him to the conclusion that to change his intentions would be treason to the memory of his mama; and he clung to that memory the more desperately because it tended to grow dim. He found, too, another fortifying influence—one with which Emma herself had put him in touch when she thought she was doing something else.

"So you're going to be a clergyman? If I were a boy it's what I should want to be, too."

This was Fanny Hornblower. Since the days when they were little children together Charlie Grace had met the banker's daughter face to face but rarely. The reason for this was mainly geographical, since the Hornblower residence was in the Murray Hill district of Fifth Avenue, the

family continuing to attend St. David's from old association.

It was Emma who intervened, to keep this separation from being more prolonged. He heard her on one occasion gently chide her father for letting it begin. "Considering the future," she said, "and the combinations wrought by mere proximity, it was criminal to have neglected such an opportunity." In due time, therefore, when Emma had renewed the old family ties with Mrs. Hornblower he found himself "taking tea" at the residence in Fifth Avenue, and leading out Miss Fanny Hornblower at dancing-school and juvenile parties. She was then fifteen, a year younger than himself. She was not pretty, being thin and bony, with a mere wisp of very blond hair, pale-blue eyes, and very blond lashes. Her charm lay in an appealing gentleness charged with an eagerness to do everything for every one, making no demands for herself. Charlie Grace would probably not have thought of her as other than a sweet little girl, unusually plain, whom he liked in a condescending way because she was generally a wall-flower at dances, if Remnant hadn't said, jocosely:

"Glad to see you makin' up to little Miss Hornblower, sonny. Go it; go it. Lots o' tin."

From this moment the boy grew cold in his attentions, though he could not have given a reason for the sudden change. None the less, such scraps of intercourse as he allowed himself with her he enjoyed, and the more so when she ventured to sympathize with his plans.

"If I were a boy it's what I should want to be," she declared, in her gentle way. "There's nothing

I can think of so really noble for a man. It's what I should want to be above all things."

Confidences of this sort might have brought them nearer together if Emma hadn't said, too significantly:

"I want you to be nice to Fanny."

He bridled at once. "I *am* nice to her."

"I don't think you are—always."

"Why should I be nicer to her than to anybody else?"

"Not nicer, perhaps, but *as* nice. You'll find her a useful acquaintance when you're older."

He bounded. The formula was one he had grown to detest. "I don't choose my friends," he said, grandly, "for the sake of making use of them."

Emma became conciliating. "You're quite right. There's nothing I dislike more than calculation. It's such a common thing, too, nowadays. But, still, one has to look ahead, don't you think?"

Since he couldn't deny this necessity, Emma was able to go on.

"You especially will have to look ahead, Charlie, dear, because you have your own way to make."

"I suppose I can make it as well as other people."

"Oh, better—that is, better than the majority. I'm quite sure of that—if you only play your cards well. You hold a good hand," she smiled, "with some of the best trumps."

He looked at her with curiosity. She returned his gaze calmly. They happened to be standing in the front hall of the rectory, Emma at the door, the boy lolling over the banister, as he stood on the lowest step of the stairs. Emma had brought up the topic just as she was going out. It was part of

her touch-and-go system. The high-crowned hat which was the fashion of the day—something like an overturned, elongated saucepan—gave height to her short figure; and in her long sealskin coat, her hands composedly in her sealskin muff, she was the very picture of a self-possessed little lady.

"In fact," she continued, using the method of instilling self-confidence she had practised effectively with Noddy Tomlinson—"in fact, you may be said to hold the ace. You're very good-looking. I suppose you know that."

He did know it, in a manner of speaking. That is, he thought so himself, only he was not sure that others would agree with him. It was an immense pleasure to be corroborated by so good a judge as Emma, though all he could find to say was a sheepish "Oh, go on."

"You are," she insisted, "and that's an enormous advantage as a start. It has to be backed up, however. You'll always be welcome wherever you go; but you'll be more welcome if you cultivate your opportunities. That's all I mean. That's all I'm thinking of in asking you to be nice to Fanny."

There was more of Emma's philosophy, of which it was not difficult to catch the inner significance. If he got on his high horse about it it was chiefly because he could hear a sympathetic response to it within himself. He recognized the fact that the things that Emma wanted he, too, wanted dearly, and yet could hardly bear to make the admission to his secret soul. As a matter of fact, to his secret soul he declared that he despised them. He could pardon them to Emma because she was a woman, after all. It was natural to a woman to care for the gew-

gaws of life, and to study the arts of getting them; whereas the imputation of this weakness to a man—to a man of sixteen, especially—was little short of an indignity.

During the next few weeks he was colder than before to Fanny Hornblower, while he sought the society, notably unremunerative, of Hattie Bright.

This young lady, at the age of nearly seventeen, was even more seductive than she had been at twelve. Out of the little fluffy ball of 1880 she had shot up fair and lissom, like a daffodil from a bulb. Rather, perhaps, it was like a hyacinth, since she had plenty of rich April tints in her complexion, while her eyes laughed unutterable things as archly as those of a Romney's Lady Hamilton. From the dingy boarding-house, dominated by the querulous nagging of Mrs. Bright, she contrived to emerge fresh as springtide, and not less stylish th colored plate in Godey's *Lady's Book* matrons of St. David's it was no spirit achieved this miracle. To the y other hand, the wonder was s

For Charlie Grace she w principle which all his life Naturally enough, no a own proclivities co realized it at all, suddenly and a troubled dream workaday life a

And yet it v when the wh summed up saw the girl

he had formed them. Vaguely, mistily, in unoccupied moments—in long jolting journeys on the horse-cars, or during the enforced stillness of service in church—he got glimpses of a woman who, to the patient gentleness of Fanny Hornblower and the bodily magnetism of Hattie Bright, would add whatever in the way of feminine virtue was necessary to unify these warring characteristics. The vision had been a vision and no more. It was with a shock, therefore, that he saw it brought before him in the flesh in the person of Hilda Penrhyn.

This occurrence, too, was due to Emma's solicitude for his welfare. It would be good for him, she reasoned, to know a girl like Hilda, who now, at the age of eighteen, had left Tubb's Ferry and entered society. Knowing his oppositions and irritabilities, Emma told him nothing of her plans beforehand. She was content to invite him to see the opera of [illegible]" at a Saturday matinée. Excited by the [illegible]d brilliancy of the incoming audience, [illegible]ry shape and size and smell of the [illegible]as twisting and turning in his [illegible] to any one, when Emma [illegible]lace in the row and said: [illegible]you know my brother

[illegible]was, with those [illegible]th, one of the [illegible]o the present [illegible] desire to be [illegible] a worshiper [illegible]as far from

his mind as it was with Fanny Hornblower or Hattie Bright, but the impulse to kneel and serve was instinctive. It was all he could think of doing. He knew, of course, that there was such a thing as love, and that one day he should come to it; but he knew, too, that he was not ready for it yet. For Hilda Penrhyn there was nothing in his mind but service. If she had wanted a program he would have as gladly risked his life to get it as David's soldiers to fetch him water from the well at Bethlehem.

But she had a program; she had opera-glasses; she had everything a young lady at a public performance could require. Moreover, during the brief ceremony of introduction she had glanced at him but languidly, turning away at once to converse with Sophy, who sat on her other side. The boy bore her no ill will for that. It was natural that a beautiful creature of eighteen who was already going to dinner-parties should have "no use" for a callow lad two years her junior and very much out of her "set." It was no more possible to resent her hauteur than for a Hindu of the water-bearing caste to complain of insolence from a Brahman.

Fortunately for his immediate peace of mind, the orchestra struck up the overture, and presently Minnie Hauck, a rose between her teeth and deviltry in her eyes and voice, came bounding on the scene. But so it happened that while he followed the drama on the stage he also thrilled to a drama of his own creation. It was a drama without incidents, without action, without words, and with no *dramatis personæ* but himself and the silent girl beside him. It played itself in the passions of the piece, and sang itself in the gipsy airs, and took the tones

and faces of each of the performers. There was cruelty, lust, and caprice in it, lassitude and jealousy, joy and death.

During the entr'actes he stopped playing it, because as soon as the first curtain went down she spoke to him and there was always the chance that she might speak again.

"Do you like opera?" were her words.

She spoke in the dry, staccato tone which implies concession to polite conventions but bridges no inch of the distance that separates two souls. He didn't mind that. It was condescension enough that she should speak at all.

"I like this opera," he said, trying to throw a world of meaning into the penultimate word.

"I don't think I do."

He was longing to ask her why, but feared to be presuming. Before he could think of some other means of keeping up the dialogue she had already turned toward Sophy. Her face being partially averted, he took the opportunity to get a clearer idea of her appearance. This he could do but surreptitiously, as he feared that if she looked round suddenly, she might resent his staring at her. His impressions, therefore, were in general rather than in detail. Before everything else, as he thought her over afterward, she struck him as complete. There was nothing about her that was not finished, perfected. He could see that she was not tall, but that she must have the poise that gives to some women who lack height a dignity of their own. Her hair, worn in a twist low on the neck, was nut-brown in color, and he had already noticed the ivory tint of her skin when, in stolen glances, while the opera was

going on, he had caught the delicate incisiveness of her profile. He could only guess at the color of her eyes, but he was sure they must be violet-brown.

On the way home he braced himself to speak of her to Sophy, who was spending the night at the rectory, to go back to Tubb's Ferry on the following afternoon. He trusted to the jostling of the crowds as they walked down Broadway in the lamplight to cover any confusion into which he might be betrayed, as he said:

"So that's the wonderful Miss Penrhyn."

"That's her." Sophy's way of speaking was Emma's despair. She looked up at him sidewise from under a fluffy fringe of hair imperfectly held in place by the scarf she had bound round her head and neck on coming out of the opera-house. Over her flimsy dress she wore a long fur coat in which she trudged heavily. She was a little thing. Everything about her was small but her mouth and her eyes, which were made for laughter and droll grimaces. "I wouldn't be crazy about her, you know," Sophy continued. "She didn't take much notice of *you*, did she?"

"I'm not crazy about her," he declared, hastily. "I hardly looked at her at all."

"Well, you needn't be so touchy. She isn't bad-looking."

"It's nothing to me whether she is or not," he asserted, loftily.

"She'd make it something to you if she wanted to. But she wouldn't want to—a boy of your age. She'd hardly see you—not if you were right under her feet, she wouldn't. She had a proposal last year—"

"What do I care?"

"I didn't say you cared, goosey. What difference would it make whether you cared or not?—a young boy like you. You shouldn't be thinking of such things. Grandpapa 'u'd be mad if he knew it."

"Knew what—for the Lord's sake?"

"Oh, well, we won't discuss it. She's got an air, too, Hilda has. She doesn't really dress well—all the girls at school said that—only she looks as if she did. I suppose you thought she was awfully stylish this afternoon?"

"I tell you I didn't look at her."

"Well, she wasn't stylish; not a bit. She wore that thing all last winter. Couldn't you see how it was cut in front? They've been as poor as Job's turkey since Mr. Penrhyn died. That's why they're going abroad."

At this information the ground seemed to sway beneath his footsteps. More than ever he wished he could put his fortune or his prowess at her disposal. He mastered himself sufficiently to say, with an air he tried to make jocular:

"Going abroad, are they? What good 'll that do them?"

Sophy tittered. "It 'll do them the good that perhaps she'll get married."

"Can't she get married over here?"

"That's what *I* say; but mother and Mrs. Penrhyn think she'll do better in Europe. I suppose they'll get the same idea about me. They'll want me to have a baron or a count. Well, I'd just as soon. The girls at school say it's as easy as wink over there. So that's what Mrs. Penrhyn is going to make a try at for Hilda. If it doesn't succeed she can bring her back, you know."

"And what does Hilda say about it?"

"She doesn't say anything at all. That's not her style—to say things. She's awfully provoking that way. You never know what she thinks—and yet she's always thinking. You can see she is. But you may talk and talk and talk to her, and in the end you're no wiser than you were before. I hate that in any one, don't you? Not that it matters whether you do or not, because I could see she didn't like you."

CHAPTER VIII

ON the following evening, being Sunday, Mr. and Mrs. Legrand came to supper at the rectory, after the late service, as they often did. While on such occasions the rector enjoyed his cigar and Legrand his pipe they took the opportunity to discuss the incidents of the week that had passed and any plans that might come up for future work. Supper ended, Emma, when there, generally retired to the drawing-room with Mrs. Legrand, the two men lingering at the table. Charlie Grace would slip into the study to con his lessons for the morrow, but taking care to leave the door of communication open. By this means, without eavesdropping, he not infrequently obtained bits of information valuable to himself. On this particular evening he was trying to master the provisions of the Conventicle and Five-Mile Acts, as set forth in his *Medieval and Modern History*, when he heard his father say:

"The bishop writes me he will come to us on the third Sunday after Easter. I hope we shall have a good confirmation class. We haven't had for several years past. I don't like to see things falling off. How many did we have last year? Twenty-four, wasn't it? We never used to fall below thirty-five or forty."

For Charlie Grace the Conventicle and Five-Mile Acts ceased to have an interest. He was sure that

something was going to happen to which he had long looked forward with a kind of dread. He would have to be confirmed. As Legrand said nothing, the boy listened attentively while his father went on:

"There are a number of young people who ought to be ready now. There's my boy, Charlie, and young Fred Furnival, and Reginald Hornblower and his sister Frances, and Harriet Bright, and—"

The boy closed his book and crept softly up-stairs to his room. He had an odd feeling of being trapped —not by his father, nor by the ecclesiastical usages of the society in which he had grown up, but by life itself. In spite of his intention "to be a minister," as his phrase was, he had never relinquished, in the matter of religion, half-formed hopes of being able to drift along without declaring himself too definitely as to either faith or conduct. Now it was as though he were about to be headed off and challenged to take a stand. It made him uneasy; it even alarmed him. Some inward force that defied his control objected to taking a stand; he was far from sure that he had a stand to take.

He kept silence on the subject, however, till a few days later, when he found himself, according to custom, walking home from school with Furny. Having tired of the game of clouting each other with their satchels full of books, Furny said, suddenly:

"My old man says I've got to be confirmed."

On the principle that misery loves company this information was welcome to Charlie Grace. Whatever he might be called on to go through, he should have some one to keep him in countenance. Nevertheless, he contented himself with saying:

"And are you going to be?"

Furny made a dash with his satchel at a wandering dog, which, with reproachful eyes, took a wide circuit into the street. "You bet! Got to be. Are you?"

"My old man hasn't said anything to me about it yet. But I expect he will."

"Oh, well, what's the odds? Everybody gets confirmed some time. My old man was confirmed when he was only fourteen. What do they do it for, anyhow?"

"I do' know." Then, feeling the responsibility of his future career already upon him, Charlie Grace added, "I suppose they do it because it's right."

"Yes, but what *makes* it right? My old man doesn't know, and he was confirmed when he was fourteen years old. Mother just says it's the proper thing to do. Anyhow, I don't care. Besides, my old man says that if I'm confirmed I can give up botany. That's another thing I don't see the sense of. Do you?"

Charlie Grace admitted that he didn't, and so the subject changed.

It lay on his mind, however, and when in the course of the week the inspiration came to lay it before Rufus Legrand he acted on the impulse.

"Mr. Legrand, what do people have to be confirmed for?"

He had been sent by his father into the vestry of St. David's with a note. Legrand read it as he stood. In his cassock he was very spare and tall. His thin, regular features, handsome in an ascetic way, got emphasis from the surroundings. When he had said there was no answer to the note the boy

already had his hand on the door-knob to go away. He had blurted out his question as to the necessity for confirmation before taking the time to reflect.

For a minute or two Legrand was silent, trying to follow the working of the lad's mind. The latter still stood with his hand on the door-knob, his eyes rolling round on the familiar furnishings of the vestry—on the Gothic desk where the clergy wrote their notes, on the portraits of the three successive rectors of St. David's hanging above it, on the row of engraved or photographed heads of the bishops of New York, on an old print of Vandiver Place as it had been forty years before, on the assistant's surplice and stole, thrown temporarily over the back of a Gothic chair, as he had come into the vestry from "taking evensong."

"They *don't* have to be confirmed," Legrand said, at last.

The boy felt this to be begging the question. "I know they don't have to be unless they want to, but—"

"That's just it—unless they want to. The action must be voluntary—it must spring from a desire."

"Well, I haven't got any desire."

Again the words were out before he knew it. If he had taken time to think he would probably have kept that special bit of information to himself. Legrand heard it, however, without sign of surprise, saying, merely:

"Haven't you? Then I dare say you'd better not be confirmed."

"But papa wants me to."

"I'll talk to him about that if you like."

This prompt way of settling the question did not,

however, appeal to Charlie Grace. The matter seemed to him to require more circumlocution, perhaps more argument. "I don't want *not* to be confirmed," he stammered, "only—only—I want to keep free to do things—I'm—I'm fond of doing."

"So you would be—except for wrong things."

There was a perceptible pause before the boy said, "But that's what I mean—wrong things."

"Wrong things—such as—"

The boy reddened. "Such as I've done—often—and other things—such as I expect—I *shall* do. I shall never be good, Mr. Legrand," he declared, with a catch in his voice. "It isn't in me. I'm full up of something else. I guess if I ever die I shall go to hell."

Legrand smiled. "Isn't that traveling a little too fast? I dare say some of your trouble lies there. You're not satisfied with thinking how bad you are, but you must go on to imagine how much worse you're going to be."

"But when I *know*—"

"Oh no, you don't. You don't know a bit better than I do. I should advise you, however, not to make the thought father to the wish. One can, you know."

The boy had been so near to tears that he was obliged to snuffle and blow his nose. He had a vague expectation, too, that Legrand would ask the obvious question as to how he thought of entering on his future career if he balked at its preliminaries now. He was both disappointed and relieved at getting away from the vestry without having the subject raised.

And yet when the third Sunday after Easter came round he was confirmed. He was confirmed

for a number of reasons, each one of which seemed compulsory. First of all, there was no way of meeting his father with the frankness he could use toward Rufus Legrand. Then he realized that if by refusal he escaped this year he should be confronted by the same situation a twelvemonth later. Then, the rector's dismay at the meagerness of the class was such that the boy resolved to step up with Furny and young Hornblower and Hattie Bright, and some fifteen or sixteen others, and make one more for his father's sake, whatever the spiritual consequence. Lastly, before Easter came Rufus Legrand had gone away, leaving his parishioner master of his acts.

Charlie Grace received the first intimation of the coming change from the lips of little Esther Legrand as he sat on the sofa in her mother's drawing-room. He had been sent to deliver a message from the rector to the assistant, and was waiting for Mrs. Legrand to come down-stairs to receive it.

The little four-year-old appeared shyly in the doorway, hugging a rag-doll.

"Hello, Esther." The boy leaned forward, his elbows on his knees, snapping his fingers by way of greeting. "Come here."

She looked at him in silence, with big grave eyes. "Did you ever notice the eyes of that Legrand young one?" he had asked not long since of Hattie Bright.

"I've noticed," she replied, "that you can't tell whether they're blue or black. Just when you think they're the one you'll see they're the other—and then it 'll be the opposite way round. I think it's ridic'lous the way Mrs. Legrand dresses her, don't

you? I declare that woman has so many airs she just about makes me sick."

"I think she's lovely," the boy asserted, loyally. "She's pretty, too."

"Pretty? So is a china doll pretty. Whatever a man like Mr. Legrand could have seen in her—"

Hattie was obliged to leave her sentence unfinished, for the question had puzzled older heads than hers. Rather, it would have puzzled them if life had not accustomed them to so many queer mysteries in mating that the subject was placed beyond the scope of inquiry.

There was nothing "ridic'lous," however, in the way little Esther Legrand was dressed on this particular forenoon, seeing that she wore a little white silk frock, "smocked *à l'anglaise*," as Mrs. Legrand was fond of saying, from the wardrobe of some wealthier relative. She was acquainted with Charlie Grace well enough not to be afraid of him, and yet not so well as to be intimate. In response to his invitation she advanced slowly into the room, coming to a pause at a safe distance.

"My papa 'u'd going fa-a-a' away," she informed him, with a prolonged coo on the word "fa'" to indicate distance.

He continued to snap his fingers as at a little dog. "Come here, Esther, and let me look at your eyes."

"Po' dolly sick," she informed him, maintaining her ground. "She wamited all night."

"Well, I'm a doctor. Bring her to me."

"She wamited and wamited and wamited. My papa," she began again, more solemnly, "'u'd going fa-a-a' away. Po' dolly."

With strong, light step Mrs. Legrand came down the stairs and into the room.

"Oh, Charlie, I'm so sorry to keep you waiting."

He stood up to deliver the message he was leaving for Mr. Legrand. She, too, stood while she listened to it, her hands in the pockets of a little apron edged with lace. Except for a slight fullness in the cheeks and the merest hint of an approaching double chin she was as pretty as when she appeared in Vandiver Place as a bride. Her rose-petal complexion was almost as fresh as ever, and she still had the habit of holding her head to one side with a challenging little smile.

"Yes; I'm to tell Mr. Legrand that old Mr. Piper died this morning, and will he kindly call at the house to make arrangements for the funeral. Is that it?"

She had so long pretended helplessness with regard to parish affairs that she had acquired it at last as an accomplishment.

"My papa 'u'd going fa-a-a' away," the little girl said, solemnly, again.

Charlie Grace laughed. "What does she mean? She's said that two or three times."

The mother looked down proudly. "What did you say, darling? Say it again to mama. There's a love."

"My papa 'u'd going fa-a-a' away," the child said, obediently.

Even the mother was obliged to think twice before catching the little girl's drift. When she did she covered her face with her hands and threw herself, laughing, into a corner of the sofa. "Oh, that child! She'll be the death of me. What do you think she's got hold of now? Do sit down, Charlie. I simply

must tell some one. You'll know it in a day or two, anyhow."

He seated himself in the other corner of the sofa while his hostess ran on. "We're going away. She's heard us talking it over. Who'd have thought that a little creature like that could have been listening? Oh, she's clever. Clever isn't the word. Well, we are. Mr. Legrand made up his mind last night. He's going to tell your father to-day."

"I'm awfully sorry," the boy said, sincerely.

"Well, so am I—in a way. But, you see, Mr. Legrand has had this very good offer from Trenton, and he doesn't feel it right to decline. You see, he couldn't go on forever being an assistant—don't you know he couldn't?—and this will make him his own master. And such a good position—one of the most exclusive churches in New Jersey. If he'll only keep it so. That's what I'm afraid of. You don't know what I've gone through here at St. David's—to see him throw away his opportunities. I feel it on her account," she went on, with a gesture toward the little girl. "We've no money; but we *have* position—don't you know we have?—and to fling it away— It's doing her a great wrong, poor lamb, only I can't make my husband understand it. Poor darling," she cried, seizing the child in her arms, "you sha'n't drop out if mama can keep you in—and she *will* keep you in. That's all, Charlie. Don't say anything about it till Mr. Legrand has spoken to your father; but I know he's going to do it to-day. Of course, I shall die when I leave New York; but we must get used to that, mustn't we? I hope I'm too good a wife to stand in my husband's way when he has this very good chance to pick up

again. And—who knows?—we may be back in New York before you know it. I've often thought that if your father was made a bishop—and of course he will be—Mr. Legrand would be the very one for St. Dav— But it's too early to talk about that yet. Only one looks ahead—don't you know one does?—and with Rufus's antecedents—and mine, I may say, too—well, you can see that I feel we're only going away temporarily. But of course I shall die. I've never lived anywhere but in New York; and if it wasn't that I feel so strongly that Rufus should have another chance—and profit perhaps by the mistakes he's made here . . ."

Feeling it safe to speak in the evening, Charlie Grace said at supper:

"Is Mr. Legrand going away, papa?"

Father and son were alone, Emma having recently gone to join her husband at Winnipeg. The rector raised his brows, taking on an expression of conventional distress, before he replied:

"I think I may say he is. Who told you?"

The boy spoke of his talk with Mrs. Legrand.

"A good woman," Dr. Grace commented; "somewhat feather-headed, but right in the main. Legrand has tried her—rather sorely."

"That's because he works among the poor and wants to do them good, isn't it?"

The rector looked at his son suspiciously. "Not at all," he said, haughtily. "There's no criticism to be made of Legrand's zeal; one is only obliged to question his discretion."

The boy flushed. It was the first time in his life that he had ever felt moved to rebel against the parochial view of religion. "I shouldn't think," he

said, trying to speak as respectfully as indignation would let him—"I shouldn't think there was much room for discretion where the duties are so plain."

"That's because you know so little about it," the father said, sharply. "When you're older you'll see that we must take human nature as we find it. Legrand is an excellent man—perfectly apostolic—but he lacks judgment. You're old enough now to allow of my speaking to you plainly; and I will not deny that, greatly as I regret his going from some points of view—from *some* points of view—his departure will not be without a measure of relief to me. A worthy, worthy fellow, but not suited to St. David's. It's the more extraordinary when you think of the family he comes from."

The boy's heart grew hot within him. "I can understand that Mrs. Legrand should feel like that because—well, because we know what she is. But that you, papa—"

The rector smiled tolerantly. "There's one of Legrand's mistakes not infrequently made by people who haven't reflected. It's this—that the only souls to be saved are those of the poor. They ignore the fact that the rich and the educated have need of the message of the Gospel as well as the worker in the factory or the dweller in the slums."

"But not as much—because they've got all the advantages of money and—"

"We're not making comparisons," Dr. Grace interrupted, with a dignified gesture. "I'm only saying that the well-to-do are in actual need of the message of the Gospel, and it is to the well-to-do in particular that St. David's mission has been to

minister. That's a condition we didn't create; we simply find it so. And till our good Legrand came among us I think we fulfilled our responsibilities with some success. Since then— Well, I need hardly discuss the matter. It merely comes to this, that while Legrand has been bringing people in at one end he's been frightening them out at the other, with the result that our attendance is falling off, our income decreasing, and I, myself, brought to a state of much anxiety of mind."

"If the rich go out at one end because the poor come in at the other, then, I should think, they must have a pretty mean kind of religion."

Once more the rector smiled tolerantly. "We must take human nature as we find it. Man is a social animal, and in no country in the world do social conditions become the touchstone of conduct so generally as here in America. For this the reason is simple enough to a really reflecting mind. In England and elsewhere in Europe class distinctions are so plainly drawn that one can afford on occasions to transcend them. With us it isn't so. With us each man has to be, as it were, the defender of his own order—"

"But I thought there were no class distinctions in religion."

"Not in religion, perhaps; but in a church—that is, in a parish—especially in an *American* church or an *American* parish—not to respect the natural lines of social cleavage is to induce confusion."

Dr. Grace rose with the air of one who has said the conclusive word, and withdrew to the study. The boy lingered at the table, his first feeling of rebellious irritation dying down. Now that his father

was not actually present, it was easier to think he might be right. He tried conscientiously to feel so; but in making the attempt he found Remnant's favorite aphorism crossing his mind with disquieting insistence: "There's a lot of hollerness to religion."

CHAPTER IX

"THERE'S a lot of hollerness to religion." Charlie Grace said this to himself, bitterly, eighteen months later, after an experience on behalf of Hattie Bright. He had met her as she hurried homeward through the twilight of a May evening. He had not seen her for nearly a year. Both Mrs. Bright and Hattie had dropped out of the habit of attending church.

"Hel-lo, Hattie." He was unaffectedly glad to see her. "Where have you been this ever so long?"

"Oh, I'm doing dressmaking. I'm always busy. I have to work very hard. And then on Sundays I'm tired. Besides, I have to help mother. Poor mother, she's been having an awful time."

He noticed now that she was not the Hattie of their last meeting. Something had come into her face, and something had gone. She was less pretty, and more beautiful. If care had driven the roguery from her eyes it had given them a look of distress of which the appeal was even more seductive. She was well dressed, of course; she would probably not have known how to dress in any other way. Charlie Grace turned to walk beside her.

"What do you mean by having an awful time?"

"Oh, it's the house. It hasn't been paying for a long while, and now we're terribly behind. I don't know what's to become of us."

"Is it"—he hesitated to seem inquisitive—"is it —debt?"

"Debt? I should think so. We owe everybody—and now we can't get any one to trust us."

She walked rapidly, as though trying to get away from him.

"What do you do, then?"

She gave a short laugh. "Do? We don't do. What does any one do when there's not enough in the house to eat?"

"Oh, but Hattie—"

"I've seen it coming for a long time. It never really paid. If ever you're down on your luck, for God's sake don't let any one persuade you to start a boarding-house. That's the last thing. And mother was about as well suited to it as an old hen. It wasn't so bad in the days when people wanted to live in this part of New York, but now—"

"But what do you do with the boarders, if there's not enough in the house to eat? You were joking when you said that, weren't you?"

"I wish I had been. But the boarders don't worry us—for the simple reason that we haven't any. The last of them went two days ago. That was old Miss Grimes. You remember her, don't you? She's been with us since I can't tell the day when. Mother thought that whatever happened *she'd* stay. But she's gone; and I'm glad she is. We can starve ourselves with a clear conscience; but it's another thing to be starving old Miss Grimes."

"But, Hattie, you *must* be joking."

"Oh, very well. I'm joking. It's a great joke to have the butcher, and the grocer, and the fishman,

and the iceman, all tell you they can't supply you any more—and the landlord say that if you'll only clear out without giving trouble he'll not bother you about the arrears of rent. That's perfectly screaming, that joke is. But there's a good side to it, too. None of them will worry us about the past if we'll only go—and not eat anything or drink anything or live anywhere any more. It's like what they call a general amnesty, isn't it?—only an amnesty on condition that you get off the earth."

The noise of the Elevated under which they were passing kept them from saying more for a minute or two. Charlie Grace was thinking hard. "How much do you owe?" he asked, when they reached the pavement on the other side.

She made a sound of impatience. "Pff! What's the use of counting up? We owe every one. Isn't that enough?"

"Would it be as much as a thousand dollars?"

She considered. "N-no; not as much as that. It might be five hundred, though."

"Five hundred isn't such a lot—not when it comes to debts."

"It's a lot when you couldn't raise fifty—not if your life depended on it."

"If you left your present house," he asked, after more thinking, "where would you go?"

"God only knows. I don't. I suppose there'd be some place for us, but I can't think where. I get nine a week, and mother wouldn't have anything. There are probably dog-holes in New York where nine a week will take care of two women, but I haven't looked for them yet."

"Oh, but you can't be left like that."

"My dear boy, we *are* left like that. What's the use of talking."

"Haven't you any relations?—any friends?"

"We've no friends, but we have a relation—one—my father's brother. He's an old broken-down doctor, who was once in jail for something awful—I don't know what. We have nothing to do with him, except that he sometimes comes round to the kitchen for a meal. My mother's family are farming people in Prince Edward Island, up in the Gulf of St. Lawrence. They can't help us. We should never even hear of them if the Hornblowers didn't go there for part of the summer. It agrees with Mrs. Hornblower. They see them, and Fanny tells me. She's real nice, Fanny is—real sweet. She often talks of the time we were confirmed together. We were side by side. I thought they dressed her rather mean, considering their money. Reggie's fast, don't you think? I wish he wouldn't come teasing after me the way he does. What do you suppose he wants? I'm sure I don't give him any encouragement—not me."

That night, as he was leaving the study to go to bed, Charlie Grace said:

"Father, did you know Mrs. Bright was very hard up? She has no more boarders, and they haven't enough in the house to eat."

The rector raised his head from the letter he was writing and surveyed his son.

"Who told you?" he asked, after a pause.

"Hattie; I met her in the street—"

"You know I've never liked that intimacy. It doesn't strike me as seemly that a young man in your position—"

"There's no question of anything like that, father. But it's true, what I'm telling you. They've no boarders; the landlord has given them notice to quit; and they're literally in want of food. Hattie is dressmaking. She gets nine dollars a week; but what's that—"

"I've always felt that things were on a precarious footing there. I've advised Mrs. Bright against going on with that house time and again."

"I suppose she couldn't do anything else. It was her plant. She'd invested her all in it, and couldn't pull out. I think we ought to do something to help her to keep in—or to make a fresh start somewhere else."

The rector raised his brows, though his eyes seemed to be contemplating the desk or the floor. "We? Who?"

"The church people—where Mrs. Bright has always attended."

"What do you propose?"

"They owe about five hundred dollars. It ought not to be hard to raise that much—among us all."

"Perhaps it ought not to be; it only *would*. Mrs. Bright hasn't made herself a favorite during the years she's been a parishioner at St. David's."

"But what's that got to do with it—whether she's a favorite or not—when she's in trouble?"

"It wouldn't have anything if it weren't for human nature; and, unfortunately, you've got to take human nature as you find it. Mrs. Bright has made herself unpopular, and I fear she will be made to suffer for that mischance. I fear it. I hardly know to whom I should dare apply—"

"I do."

Dr. Grace looked up at his son in surprise at the tone of assurance. Of late years a tone of assurance in the rectory had been rare. It was perhaps for this reason that he regarded the lad with a new interest, that he saw him in a new light. Possibly he had not till this evening taken in the fact that he was nearly eighteen years of age and six feet tall. He could hold his head proudly, too, the chin thrust upward defiantly.

"I couldn't help in the matter," the father warned him. "I shall have all I can do to put you through college when you enter Harvard in the autumn. I can manage it; but we shall have to pinch until you're earning something for yourself. I may as well tell you now what your grandfather said the last time he was here from Horsehair Hill. There'll be a little money coming to you from him—at his death. It won't be more than four or five thousand dollars; but I'm glad to know you'll have even that as a nest-egg. My expenses have been such that I've never been able to save anything to speak of, and so—"

The young man flushed. "I know that, father," he said, hastily; "and if ever this money comes to me from grandpa I shall want you to take it in return for all—"

"There'll be no question of that, my boy. I think I may say without undue confidence that at St. David's I'm provided for during such few years as may remain to me. I only want you to understand that in this affair of Mrs. Bright I shall be unable to—"

"I wasn't thinking of you, father. But I should think we might apply to Mr. Hornblower, and Miss

Smedley, and Dr. Furnival, and perhaps one or two others. They'd never miss it."

"Very well; if you choose to ask them. I don't say 'No' to it, though I shall be surprised if you get the money. Mrs. Bright has not made herself a favorite. I regret to say it, but so it is."

No later than the following afternoon Charlie Grace was admitted into the private office of Silas Hornblower, Esquire, of the firm of Weed & Hornblower, bankers and brokers, in Broad Street. His reception was distinctly cordial.

"Well, well, Charlie? This is quite an unexpected pleasure. You don't often tear yourself away from your books, do you? How is your father? What can I do for you? Will you sit down? Well, well!"

Mr. Hornblower rubbed his hands. His tone would have been more genial had the voice not been thin and harsh. The features, too, were thin and harsh. Thin and harsh were the lines of the body under the gray "cutaway" coat. Gray was Mr. Hornblower's predominating note. His complexion was gray; his hair was gray; and meager gray side-whiskers, clipped close to the skin, adorned the ferret-like face.

It was not till he had actually sat down and begun his tale that Charlie Grace realized the difficulty of asking for money. Up to this minute he supposed he should only have to state the case for Mrs. Bright to see her fellow-parishioner write a check. It was inconceivable that she should be allowed to starve, or to be turned out of house and home, when a scratch of the pen would save her. Charlie Grace had never dreamed of such a thing. It began to seem a possibility only in proportion as he saw the

thin, harsh smile fade from Mr. Hornblower's face to be followed by a look as wooden and lifeless as a mask—the look of the rich man when he is being asked for money. He had never seen anything to resemble it but the stoniness of death. Its immediate effect was to make the story more difficult in the telling.

"You see, sir, she's always had a hard time—and she's come to our church for so many years—and now they have no boarders—and so I knew if I came to you—"

Perhaps as he stumbled along the banker took pity on him, for he broke in by saying:

"Now, Charlie, I may as well tell you straight off that you're wasting my time and your own, too."

The boy shot out of his seat. At this abrupt termination to the interview he grew crimson. He was still crimson when he found himself in Broad Street. He tingled all over. It was as if he had been struck. It took some minutes of tramping along blindly into Wall Street, and then along Broadway toward the City Hall, to realize that he had asked help for a poor starving widow from a rich, generous, Christian man, and had been refused. He knew, of course, that rich men were pestered to death, as the saying went, with requests for money, but in this case the circumstances were peculiar. What did St. David's stand for? What did any church stand for? Surely if poverty were ever entitled to relief it was such poverty as Mrs. Bright's at the hands of wealthy brethren in the faith like most of the attendants at St. David's.

He was dashed but not discouraged. By the time he had made his way back to Vandiver Place he had

accepted this preliminary defeat and taken comfort to himself by saying:

"I always knew he was an old hypocrite—an old brute."

He was not surprised to find Miss Smedley really sympathetic. He knew she was at home because he saw her reading at the window as he ran up the brownstone steps.

He never entered her drawing-room without an awe that dated back to his childhood. As a matter of fact, the elaborate gilt furniture covered in purple damask would have awed any one. On the mantelpiece an ormolu work of art, showing a lady drooped in an uneasy attitude over a circular timepiece, caught the eye with a sense of relief because it was not purple, the same being true of the ormolu candlesticks with cut-glass pendants which flanked it.

"Poor things! Poor things!" Miss Smedley murmured, encouragingly, as he stumbled through the tale for the second time. "I shall certainly help. How did you come to know about it?"

He told of his meeting with Hattie.

"Well, it isn't for me to say anything against the child," Miss Smedley said, kindly. "There are others to do that. All the same, any one can *see*."

She moved her head from side to side as though sniffing a bad odor. Her dress was a long loosely fitting robe of dove-colored stuff. She affected the loosely fitting possibly to modify the fact that her figure suggested a lot of carelessly adjusted odds and ends that seemed to "chasser," as dancing-teachers said in those days, when she meant to walk, and were never at ease in sitting. As she shifted restlessly in her seat a mauve shawl that lay in her lap

slipped to the floor. Charlie Grace darted forward to pick it up.

"She's doing dressmaking now," he stated, while he performed this act of politeness.

"Oh, she won't do that long. You needn't tell me. Hattie Bright 'll find something more to her taste than dressmaking, or I don't know her. Not that I want to say anything against the child. There are others to do that. I had her in my class in Sunday-school for four years, and she's a puss. That I can tell you. I never liked the mother—that I *will* say. She always dressed the child out of her station. I've seen Hattie Bright come to Sunday-school wearing the most ridiculous things for a girl of her class. Fanny Hornblower hadn't the like—I can tell you that. And now what has it all come to? To this. Give me that footstool. Well, I'll help," she continued, as he placed the footstool under her feet. "I'll help, because it's you, Charlie. I'm glad to see you starting out so early on your career of mercy."

"Oh, but that's not the reason I want to raise the money, Miss Smedley," he said, flushing at the words "career of mercy" as if with shame. "I'm doing it because I like them—and I'm sorry for them—"

"I'm not surprised at that, not a bit. They're just the kind of women whose troubles appeal to men—whether young or old. They're pusses. That I can tell you. As for Hattie—well, I won't say anything against her. It's the sort of thing I always leave people to find out for themselves. If you weren't going to be a clergyman I should feel it my duty to warn you. As it is, I must help. How much did you say you wanted?"

It occurred to him that if she was going to be generous he might as well be daring. "Five hundred dollars would pay what they owe, but it wouldn't leave them anything over."

"Anything over? Why should it, indeed? It seems to me we're doing a good deal as it is. No one would do it for me. That I can tell you. Leave them anything over? If it did they'd spend it on dress or going to a play. Oh, I know them. Hattie's a puss—a pretty puss, I admit—but all the worse for that. Five hundred, you said?"

With her curious sidelong gait she passed into the library, separated by heavy purple portières from the room in which they had been sitting. Her shawl falling to the floor as she proceeded, he went after her and picked it up. Holding it respectfully, he watched her from a distance as, seated at a handsome library desk, she took out her checkbook and began to write. It was a large flat book with several blanks on a page, suggesting opulence and a sense of power.

"There," she said, blotting her signature and detaching the check carefully. "There; and much good may it do them."

The strip of pink paper being folded, he thought it good manners not to look at it in the lady's presence. He wondered if she had given him the whole of the five hundred or only the half. From her smile and the fact that she was known to be generous he felt justified in hoping he had got it all.

"There, there; that 'll do," she said, impatiently, in response to the profuseness of his thanks. "Of course I must help. I always do when money is wanted at St. David's—and goodness knows the

calls come often enough nowadays. I can't imagine where all the money's gone that used to be in the church. Well, good-by. Tell your father I never expect to see him again. That's a joke, of course. I'm not the one to complain about lack of attentions. I only wish every one was like me. Most people think the rector of a church has nothing to do but call on them. When I see your father I want to tell him what old Mrs. Pemberton gave as her excuse for leaving St. David's. He'll never get over it. But it 'll put him on his guard. That I can tell you."

He dared not look at the check till he was out of sight of Miss Smedley's windows. It was for fifty dollars.

It took him the rest of the afternoon to readjust his point of view and to see that this was as much as he had a right to expect Miss Smedley to give. He couldn't call her mean, as his first impulse was to do. On the contrary, she had made what any one would call a handsome contribution, and it was only reasonable to look to others to do the rest.

With this conviction, and spirits considerably dampened, he went to see Mrs. Furnival on the following afternoon. He protected himself against further disillusioning by saying in advance that if she gave him another fifty he would be content.

Mrs. Furnival was intensely interested. She was a pretty little woman, always fashionably dressed, commonly reported to be drowning marital sorrows by going a great deal into society. It was said that she knew more people than any one in New York because she "had the art of giving herself to her friends." She gave herself now to Charlie

Grace, sitting with hands clasped in her lap and eyes gazing earnestly into his.

"Dear Charlie, I can't tell you how much I admire you. Just to think of you taking all this trouble for people you hardly know. You do hardly know them, don't you? Oh yes, I remember them; though of course I should only consider them church acquaintances—if that. In church one *has* to meet people you couldn't mingle with outside. I consider that only right. I consider that it would be snobbish to make distinctions there. Some people do, I know, but I consider it does a great deal of harm to religion. Don't you? I used to make it a point to go and sit beside this Mrs. Bright whenever she came to our meetings. I consider that we ought to do everything we can to make people like that feel welcome. Don't you? I must say she sometimes struck me as presuming. That's the difficulty with that class. They don't know where to draw the line. Not that that should weigh with us now, when she's in trouble. Poor thing; you don't know how my heart bleeds for her. I'll tell you what I'll do, Charlie. I'll give you five dollars now, and if you find you can't make up the balance I'll give you five more. I'd make it ten at once if we hadn't so many calls on us. But five now I certainly *will* give. And I can't tell you how much I admire you for taking all this trouble about it. If there were only more like *you*. But then, you're going to be a clergyman, anyhow. That was settled years ago, when you put the wig into the missionary box. What a boy you were!"

It was once more a question of readjustment. At the end of a week, when his father asked him how

he was getting on, he was able to state that the fruit of his efforts was eighty dollars.

The rector lifted his brows. "Indeed? I hardly expected you to get so much."

"But *why?*"

With his lowered lids and tolerant half-smile Dr. Grace's expression was one of sphynxlike benignity. "You'd have to go somewhat deep into the philanthropic temperament to explain that. I've come to the conclusion that we're not a people easily touched by individual distress. We like our good deeds to be institutional, and in the mass. As with so many other things, so with that—we're attracted by size. It's to the overgrown university, or to the art-museum already teemingly rich, that our people like to give their benefactions, not because they're convinced they do the most good, but because they want to put their money where other people are putting theirs. If you'd gone begging for some big institution to which this five hundred dollars would have been as a drop in the sea you'd have had it in no time. But when it's for an unhappy, obscure woman, whose life depends on it, it's ten to one you can't get it. It's the kind of need that doesn't appeal to our generosity. At least, that's been my experience."

"But *why?*" the young man demanded again. "Christ didn't work through institutions. He helped the man. Institutions, even the best of them, are surely second to the individual."

Dr. Grace shrugged his shoulders. With his hands under his long black coat-tails he flapped the latter before the empty study grate. "My dear boy, when you're older you won't try to get at the

philanthropic temperament through reasons. It's like the proverbial woman—when it will it will and when it won't it won't. You've got to take it as you find it. Having had a long experience in doing that, I was convinced beforehand that you couldn't raise the money for Mrs. Bright."

It may have been the raw irritation of personal failure or it may have been indignation of a deeper kind that caused Charlie Grace, as he stood with one hand on his hip and the other grasping the back of a chair, to tremble with anger. "Then what they call their Christianity isn't Christianity at all?"

"That's a good deal to say. It's certainly Christianity of a rudimentary kind; but, then, Christianity of a rudimentary kind is all the world as yet has ever attained to. The Church, in the sense of a Body worthy of the Head, is still as much an unrealized vision as the New Jerusalem—the city with foundations of sapphire and gates of pearl. But what are you to do? You must take Christianity as you find it, or leave it alone."

"Then I can understand why there should be so many who prefer to leave it alone."

In the end he considered it less humiliating to return the eighty dollars to the donors, who took back their respective contributions without excessive signs of regret. It was summer before he spoke of the incident again. He would not have done so then but for Fanny Hornblower's concern as to what had become of poor Hattie Bright. She hadn't seen her for so long.

They were walking on the beach at Idlewild, Mr. Hornblower's residence in Long Island. Mrs. Hornblower admitted calling the place Idlewild because

one name was as good as another, and she couldn't think of anything else. The house—a cluster of red gables and yellow verandas—hung above them, at the top of a long cliff, shelving inland, and covered with olive-green scrub-oak. A schooner was beating its way down the Sound toward New York, while the mainland lay as a thin line on the horizon. Charlie Grace had come down to Idlewild to spend a Sunday.

At the mention of Hattie Bright in this sympathetic fashion he suddenly found the strings of his tongue loosed. He told Miss Hornblower of the trouble in the Bright household as it had been a few months earlier, and of his own useless efforts to relieve it.

"But why didn't you come to me?"

He confessed that he hadn't thought of it. As he said so he made subconscious note of the fact that the distress in her eyes rendered her almost pretty. She was nearly eighteen now, tall and thin, her father's harshness of outline, which she had inherited, tempered by her natural sweetness into something that resembled grace.

"But five hundred dollars," she continued, still with distress in her eyes, "is a mere nothing. I always have more than that in my little bank-account just for pin-money. Papa is so generous—that is," she added, coloring, "when he really understands. You mustn't think hardly of him, Charlie. You see, this is something he—he—he naturally wouldn't understand. But I would. Any girl would. Oh, why *didn't* you come to me?"

It was difficult to tell her that to him, at least, five hundred dollars was a sum such as he had been

accustomed to associate only with grown-up people of wealth—with bankers like her father or heiresses like Miss Smedley. He was even more ashamed of the poverty of his ideas than of that of his purse. He made the explanation somehow, though she was so little interested as to say:

"Perhaps it isn't too late even now."

"Oh, it must be," he declared. "They're either all right by this time or else they're dead. It's the sort of thing that has to be short and sharp, one way or the other."

"I don't see that. I don't see that at all. They may have been able to scrape along up to now, and still be in debt. I wish you'd go and see."

He did go and see on Monday morning, immediately on his return to New York. But Mrs. Bright and her daughter had gone and the boarding-house had been turned into a "three-family" tenement. Moreover, no one could tell him where the late occupants had found refuge. Some said in Harlem, others in Hoboken; but no one knew for sure.

CHAPTER X

BECK HALL, CAMBRIDGE, *June 6, 1889.*

DEAR CHARLIE,—My sister is in Boston for a few days staying with the Crumps. Will you come here to my room to-morrow, Saturday, about five, to meet her and have tea?

Yours,

R. HORNBLOWER.

There were several reasons why the foregoing note should take Charlie Grace by surprise. Of these the most important lay in the separation that nearly two years at Harvard had wrought between him and the two friends with whom he had entered on his university career. Owing to the necessity of making the best clubs, and not being seen with the wrong people, Furny and Reggie Hornblower had been obliged to drop him. The process, which had begun during the latter part of the freshman year, was in full operation when they returned to Cambridge as sophomores. That it was pleasant to the victim of it could not be admitted, and yet he was philosophic enough to see that if his old chums were to reach the goal of their ambitions it could only be at the sacrifice of friendship. Perhaps the one marked experience of his earlier months at Harvard was in finding himself weeded out from among "the right people" and herded with "the wrong." His astonishment was the greater in that he had not

supposed the process to be going on before discovering the fact accomplished. The method had been as silent and mysterious as the return of winter, and as cold.

At first the several hundred young men who formed the freshman class had represented multitude without personality, like a swarm of bees. Then had come broad and general lines of cleavage; then affiliations and selections; then elections and segregations; then the scorn from the top and the envy from the bottom that have characterized the social groupings of mankind since the world began.

To do Charlie Grace justice, he was tolerably free from envy. He had had moments of indignation and revolt, but he had learned that if his old chums were to reap the highest advantages of Harvard they must do it in the Harvard way. They could not afford to be intimate with him; they could hardly afford to know him.

Perceiving this, he was able to be tolerant when he thought of them, and could even justify, from the Harvard point of view, their methods of procedure. Nevertheless, he was obliged to read Reggie's letter a second and a third time to be sure of its meaning. It could hardly be that after the embarrassing shifts to which he had driven Reggie during the past eighteen months the latter could be inviting him now to a social function. If he were giving a tea he would be "queering himself," as the phrase began to go among undergraduates, by the mere presence of such an outsider as himself. And yet what else did the invitation imply? If Fanny were coming she must of necessity be accompanied by Mrs. Crump; and in Boston Crump was a name to com-

mand awe. Just to be admitted where Mrs. Crump was doing the honors would be little short of being "taken up."

He began to pace his room. It was time for him to run out to the frugal breakfast he took at a counter in Harvard Square, but he had forgotten he was hungry. There was one suggestion which might offer an explanation, but which he did his best to put away. He could have done this the more easily if it had come for the first time; but, unfortunately, the suspicion that Fanny cared for him was of nearly a year's duration. It had struck him quite suddenly one day in the preceding summer when he had spent a Sunday at Idlewild in Reggie's absence. Since then it had haunted him, though whenever it came he tried to dismiss it by calling himself an ass. He called himself an ass again, but the ridiculous thought persisted.

It was this persistence that finally sent him to his desk.

DEAR REGGIE,—Awfully sorry. Very busy. Can't come.

Yours, C. GRACE.

He felt better after that. He could even have forgotten the incident if, on coming back to his room later in the day, he had not found a note from Fanny herself, delivered at the house by hand.

DEAR CHARLIE,—Reggie telephones me that you are not coming to his rooms this afternoon. Do try to. I must see you somewhere. I have something very important to tell you. Very sincerely yours,

FRANCES HORNBLOWER.

There was nothing for it, then, but to brush up his best suit, which he rarely had occasion to put on, and present himself at Beck a little after five. He had not been in Reggie's quarters since the early freshman weeks, before the process of election and predestination had begun. After his own dingy lodging he couldn't help finding the Beck Hall suite impressive, with its arm-chairs and cushions and hangings, with its handsome book-cases full of handsome books, and its appropriate Harvard sporting trophies decoratively arranged. It being June, the windows were open, and a faint fragrance of lilac stole in. Down in the courts, between the hall and the gray-stone church, privileged, godlike youths were playing tennis.

In response to his knock Reggie himself opened the door, greeting him with the over-friendliness that tries to hide constraint.

"Hel-lo, old Charlie. Gad! it's good to see you! Where do you keep yourself all the time? Here's Fanny. Mrs. Crump, this is Mr. Grace. You must have heard me speak of him."

Mrs. Crump, whose position at the tea-table placed her in profile toward the door, turned and surveyed him with a look that said nothing at all. She was plain, stout, middle-aged, and dressed in white.

"How do you like your tea?" she asked, in a neutral voice, without further greeting. "Lemon or cream?"

He thanked her, and declined tea, whereupon she turned to Reggie, who had already retaken his seat beside her.

"So I told her," she continued to Reggie, speaking

in her even, neutral voice, "that if she scattered her invitations broadcast like that she couldn't look to me to keep her straight. She hardly could, could she? What do *you* think?"

Reggie, with his elbows on his knee, his saucer in one hand and his cup in the other, proceeded to give his opinion in the low tones of one who discusses a reverent theme reverently. He had all the good looks in the Hornblower family, the face being delicate—perhaps too delicate—and not without a touch of distinction. The eyes were prominent and rather weak; but the mouth was well formed, and marked by the coming of a young mustache. In his gray coat and trousers, relieved by a white waistcoat of the latest cut and set off by a lavender-gray tie with a pearl in it, he was immaculately spick and span. For the first time since his coming to Harvard Charlie Grace began to perceive that between the right people and the wrong there *was* a gulf, to the width and depth of which he had not hitherto done justice. He questioned whether he could ever have looked like that, even with Reggie's tailor and resources.

"Won't you come over here and talk to me?"

He found himself sitting beside the open window with Fanny, who was eating a bit of cake and sipping her tea. They talked at first of things indifferent, of his work in college, of her winter abroad.

He had not seen her since the previous summer at Idlewild, and noted at once that she had changed for the better. Perhaps because the Parisian *couturière* had dressed her in feathers and laces and soft swathing things she was less angular and severe. Into the creamy white of her costume the artist

had introduced touches of pale-blue satin, which brought out the sweet mistiness of her pale-blue eyes.

Some ten desultory minutes had gone by when Mrs. Crump rose and said:

"We're going down to the courts to see the tennis. I suppose you don't want to come?"

As though in response to a cue already arranged, Fanny replied:

"No; it's too hot. We'll sit here and watch you from the window."

Charlie Grace wondered what it all meant. Evidently tea was over, and no more guests were expected. The whole thing had seemingly been arranged for him. The very movement of the host and the chaperon toward the tennis-court looked, as he said to himself, "like a put-up job." He confessed himself mystified.

"Sit down again," Fanny said, at once, when the door had closed. "We mayn't have many minutes, and I *must* talk to you. I've really come to Boston on purpose. I asked Mrs. Crump to take me in, and to come with me this afternoon."

Her manner had changed. As she spoke she pulled on her long gloves nervously, continuing to smooth the fingers after they were smooth already. She had drawn down her veil so that he could see her features less distinctly. He had never seen her wear a veil before. It gave the finishing touch to her appearance as a grown-up young lady.

"I suppose," she began again, "you have no idea of what I'm going to tell you?"

He shook his head. "Not the slightest—unless it is that you're engaged."

"Please don't joke, Charlie. I've come to Boston on purpose. I was afraid"—she hesitated, looking about her as though for help—"I was afraid you might hear it in some way that would be more of a shock to you. I thought that if I told you it mightn't —it mightn't seem so hard. I dare say it will, though—"

"But what is it, Fanny? What on earth is up?"

"It's about your father."

He was startled. "About my father?"

"Then I see you haven't heard at all. They've asked him—"

She stopped, biting her lower lip, trying to get sufficient self-control to go on. He set himself to think of the worst, of the most improbable calamity that could overtake the rector of St. David's.

"They haven't asked him—" He brought out the words with some difficulty. "They haven't asked him—to resign?"

"Not just in that way. They've asked him to accept the position of rector emeritus."

It was a relief to be able to say, "What's that?"

She tried to explain. "It isn't resigning exactly. It's still being a sort of rector—a sort of honorary rector—though some one else would do the work."

He went straight to the point he knew to be the most practical. "And get the salary?"

"I—I suppose so."

"And my father wouldn't have anything at all?"

"They've discussed that—I understand—in the vestry. They'd be glad to give your father a salary —a large salary—only they think the income of the church—which has fallen off a good deal of late years—perhaps you didn't know that—"

"Oh yes, I did. And they put the blame on my father."

"It isn't blame, exactly. It's— Oh, Charlie, I hardly know how to express it! But, you see, he's not young—and he's been rector of St. David's a good many years—"

"And they want a change."

"Oh, don't look like that. You make me feel as if my coming to Boston to tell you hadn't done any good."

"It's done a lot of good. If I'd heard it in any other way I don't know how I should have taken it. I'll thank you later. Just now I need to get to the bottom of the thing. It's as I say, isn't it? My father has been there too long; they're tired of him, and they want a change?"

"Not really a change. That's secondary. They only think that if they had a younger man—and more modern methods in the parish—"

"And how do they expect my father to live?"

She gazed at him wonderingly. It was evidently the sort of question she had not been in the habit of considering.

"I'm afraid I haven't thought about that. I didn't ask. I suppose they think he—he has money."

"He hasn't—hardly any."

"Oh, Charlie, hasn't he? That makes it worse, doesn't it?"

"It makes it decidedly worse. It makes it so much worse that—"

He didn't finish the sentence. There was in reality no way to finish it. How disastrous the situation was no one could say just yet. He got up to go.

She, too, rose. "You see, Charlie," she said, with tears in her eyes and in her voice—"you see, I've heard them talking of it for some time past. I naturally would—with the interest papa and mama have always taken in the parish. But I hoped—oh, I did hope!—it wouldn't happen. And then there was a meeting of the vestry at which they decided to bring it before the parish—and the parish meeting was held on Wednesday night—and the vote was—"

"I see, I see," he interrupted, wishing to spare her. "I know how it would be done. And they told my father the next day?"

"No, not the next day. Only yesterday. Papa was on the committee—so I knew it was going to be—and I came right on. I wired to Mrs. Crump—she's always been so kind—"

He held out his hand. "Good-by," he said, abruptly. "Say good-by for me to Reggie. You'll excuse my running away, won't you? I've got to think it over, and see what I have to do. I shall not try to thank you yet—"

He was still young enough to lose his voice in a choking sensation that sent him hurriedly away, especially after he had seen her turn suddenly to the window with her handkerchief to her lips.

He was near the door before she found herself able to say:

"You know, Charlie, if there's any immediate need of money—I always have some—and I could get more."

He turned with his hand on the knob. "Thank you, Fanny, but there won't be any need of that sort. I've some money of my own. Perhaps you

didn't know that when my grandfather died last year he left me six thousand dollars. If necessary, I shall spend it all—"

"Oh, but wouldn't that be a pity? Wouldn't it be better—if it's invested—to leave it—? You'll excuse me for interfering, won't you, Charlie? You don't know how broken-hearted I am—about the whole thing."

"You're kinder than I can say, Fanny; but, you see, with regard to money, I must take up the responsibilities of my father's support. I don't care what I spend—"

"But he has other children. I don't see why it should all come on you."

"He has other children, but they're not so near to him as I am. My brother Edward doesn't seem like his son at all. He's only come to see father two or three times in the last fifteen years. He hasn't been very successful, either. And of course I couldn't let Emma take Osborne Tomlinson's money —but there'll be no trouble about that. It's only the idea of the thing that I mind—the humiliation for poor father. As for money in itself, I know I could make plenty—I feel it in me—if I wasn't hampered."

"Hampered—how?"

He looked vaguely away from her. "Oh, well, I don't know. I shall have to think it all over."

CHAPTER XI

CHARLIE GRACE arrived in New York next morning. He had taken a night train, because on leaving Beck Hall it was already too late for him to catch the more economical steamer by which he generally traveled. He made up for that, however, by sitting in the day coach through the night, thus saving the expense of a bed.

In spite of the warmth of the June morning he felt stiff and benumbed. The station had the empty, purposeless air that belongs to such places on Sunday. The streets, too, were long empty thoroughfares of sunshine in which the debris of Saturday lay the more sickeningly visible because of the absence of the crowd.

Now that the excitement which had brought him had died away, he wondered for what exact purpose he had come. On leaving Beck Hall on the preceding afternoon it seemed to him that he could hardly live through the hours that must intervene before he reached home; but now in the hot glare of morning he felt that if he appeared suddenly at breakfast, as he had intended, his father might be annoyed.

For nearly half an hour he stood with his bag in his hand at the door of the station, aimlessly watching the few people who passed in and out, while he wondered what to do. In the end he strolled to the hotel across the street and had a cup of coffee and

an egg. He felt better after that, and more resolute. He still hesitated to appear too suddenly in Vandiver Place, and so hung about the lobby of the hotel, where a half-dozen country guests, unaccustomed to late sleeping even on a Sunday, were lounging in their tilted chairs, enjoying the leisure of New York.

By half past nine he had exceeded his capacity for sitting still, and with his bag in his hand he found himself descending the long shadeless stretch of Madison Avenue. Except for the newsboys with their monotonous calls, and an occasional policeman, there was scarcely a living creature to be seen. He walked on and on.

Vandiver Place, too, was hot and empty. On approaching St. David's he saw the door open, and slipped in. If he were to meet Remnant he would caution him, and steal up to the old organ-loft above the west door, which, except at Easter or on the occasion of a fashionable wedding, was always empty.

Remnant was nowhere in sight, so that Charlie Grace could creep up the narrow stairs unperceived. The gallery on which he emerged had once been sacred to the quartette choir. It was apparently a spot that Remnant felt himself entitled to neglect, for old hymn-books lay on the dusty benches, and here and there a detached sheet of some long-forgotten anthem. On the fly-leaf of the worn prayer-book he pushed away in order to sit down he read the penciled words, "Look at the hat in the third pew from the front." There was a faint odor of old perfumes in the place, as though the sopranos and contraltos who had followed each other in succeeding quartettes had left that much of their personalities behind them.

In the back seat against the wall he was well out of sight, while commanding the chancel and two-thirds of the red-lined pews below. He saw Remnant, in his beadle's gown, slipping about silently, putting books that were out of place into the racks, straightening hassocks, and otherwise "tidying up." Remnant was over fifty now, though he still retained his youthful air. His hair and mustache were slightly silvered, but otherwise Charlie Grace could see little change in his friend since the days when he himself was a child.

In the chancel Mr. Peterson, the new organist, was laying out the music. Wearing a surplice but no cassock—in order to keep his feet free for pedal-work—he presented the singular appearance of a man walking about publicly in his shirt. The rector's son was but slightly acquainted with Mr. Peterson. Mr. Wrench, who had been organist for the past twenty years, had left when the vestry proposed to reduce his salary and had already, according to Remnant, secured "a dandy, high-priced church" in Philadelphia. From the schoolroom beyond the chancel, whenever the connecting green-baize door swung open and shut, came the voices of wrangling choir-boys. Later, when Mr. Peterson had finished putting out the music, one could hear them singing scales.

Presently the congregation began to straggle in—singly—by twos and threes—husbands and wives, with their children, together. The men for the most part wore frock-coats and carried their silk hats carefully on a level with their left shoulders. The ladies and little girls were in light summer tints. He could call most of those who entered by name,

though some few were strangers. The objectionable element introduced by Rufus Legrand had almost disappeared.

There were still many unoccupied seats when Mr. Peterson began to prelude the processional hymn. In the course of some minutes the green-baize door again swung open, and little boys, clad in black cassocks and very short white surplices, began marching two and two into the church, shrilling as they came:

The King of Love my Shepherd is,
Whose goodness faileth never;
I nothing lack if I am His,
And He is mine forever.

Charlie Grace did not rise, as did the congregation below, when the choir came in. For the first time in his life he felt himself outside the current of what was taking place—a spectator, a critic.

The trebles were followed by the altos, the altos by the tenors, and the tenors by the basses. Then came Mr. Drew, the newest of the many assistants who had succeeded Mr. Legrand, walking by himself, and lastly Dr. Grace, also alone. Looking at him from this unusual height, his son noticed, what he had never seen before, that the rector was now a big unwieldy man, who, as he closed the procession, strutted and rolled perceptibly. The observation gave him a queer clutching at the heart. He began to ask if the action of the parish—which up to that minute had seemed so preposterously cruel—might not, from some points of view, be justified.

The choir having reached their places with the words,

And oh, what transport of delight
From Thy pure chalice floweth,

Mr. Peterson proceeded to play the "Amen," bringing the hymn to a close regardless of its contents.

The opening part of the service was taken by Mr. Drew in tones so mouthed and mumbled as to reduce the incomparable language as nearly as possible to a hodge-podge. Charlie Grace was accustomed to hearing the liturgy badly read, but because on this particular morning his heart was yearning for something in the nature of a message he resented Mr. Drew's incompetence. It was a relief to come to the psalms for the day, which even the high-pitched jabbering chant of the boys could not rob of their peculiar fitness to what his father might supposedly be thinking.

Put me not to rebuke, O Lord, in thine anger; neither chasten me in thy heavy displeasure:

For thine arrows stick fast in me; and thy hand presseth me sore. . . .

I have required that they, even mine enemies, should not triumph over me; for when my foot slipped they rejoiced greatly against me. . . .

They also that reward evil for good are against me; because I follow the thing that good is.

Forsake me not, O Lord my God: be not thou far from me. . . .

I have declared thy righteousness in the great congregation: lo, I will not refrain my lips, O Lord, and that thou knowest.

I have not hid thy righteousness within my heart: my talk hath been of thy truth, and of thy salvation. . . .

As for me I am poor and needy; but the Lord careth for me.

Thou art my helper and redeemer: make no long tarrying, O my God.

The rector read the lessons. His son tried to listen to him as a stranger might. It was the first time in his life he had ever attempted to judge or appraise his father. He had always supposed him to read well. He remembered that in his childhood Miss Smedley had said that Dr. Grace read the Bible as though he were "rendering Shakespeare." The son had taken this to be high praise, and had gone on ever since in the comfortable belief that it was merited. He heard now a big voice, that had once been mellow, telling the story of the fall of man —which happened to be the first lesson for the day— in tones pompous and curiously overintimate. In his sensitive state of mind Charlie Grace bent his head, blushing inwardly—for his father and himself. If this were the transmission of a divine word, he argued, it was in a way that could do little good to any one. He began to think it small wonder that those among the listless people below who cared at all should want a change.

Later his father preached. He took his text from the epistle for the first Sunday after Trinity—which Sunday it was: "In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him."

With the announcement of the text there was a momentary gleam of interest on the part of the congregation. Even though the young man could see but backs, he knew that heads were lifted and eyes turned expectantly toward the preacher. It reminded him of the patience of a dog, who, though ninety-nine times disappointed, will return the hundredth time still with a look of hope. Possibly, too,

there was some curiosity as to any reference the deposed rector might make to the events of the past week. But he made none. Slowly, ponderously, sonorously, he developed his subject, reading his manuscript with the grand manner that had made him popular in the sixties, and was now a grand manner and no more. Even with such strained and pained attention as his own Charlie Grace found it difficult to follow the laborious arguments. There was nothing spontaneous or living in the treatment of the theme. It was wordy; it was dead. Little by little eyes were averted and heads bent, while a sense of weariness pervaded the church.

Service ended, the choir marched out to the words "O, Mother dear, Jerusalem" sung to a lilt like that of a mazurka. There being no further use for the hymn when once the green-baize door was reached, Mr. Peterson sounded the "Amen" at the fourth verse, thus finishing in a query. With this note of interrogation in his heart Charlie Grace stole down the little stair again and out into the street before the congregation had begun to disperse. He knew a short cut that would take him to Broadway, where he would be beyond the risk of recognition.

The note of interrogation persisted in his thoughts. What did it mean? What was the good of it? Was this formalism worship? Could these dry bones live? Was there anything but empty sound in the piping of a lot of boys, scratched together from all parts of New York, at the rate of twenty-five cents each per Sunday?

With his bag still in his hand he hurried along the deserted pavement of Broadway toward the lower part of the city. He kept saying to himself that he

must think things over; and yet coherent thought would not come. He only knew that, for the moment at any rate, he must get as far away as possible from Vandiver Place, and so tramped on, indifferent to the heat.

It was after nine that night when he returned. He had spent the interval chiefly on the grass of Battery Park, cooling himself in the sea-breeze and watching young foreigners at play. He reacted from his spiritual depression of the morning to renewed indignation on his father's behalf. He went back to the rectory only when it became necessary to seek shelter for the night.

He knew the evening service must be over, though a few lights still gleamed pictorially through the elongated stained-glass windows. He found Remnant about to close the big west doors.

"Why, sonny!—Mr. Charlie, I mean. Good Lord, you made me think you was a ghost!"

"Well, I feel like a ghost, Remnant."

"So you do, Mr. Charlie; and you're not the only one. You've heard the news? Of course you have, or you wouldn't be here. Well, your poor pa 'll be awful glad you've come. I never see a man so changed. It's as if he'd got a stroke. It seems to me he don't talk sensible. What do you think he says to me this morning? He says to me, 'Remnant,' says he, 'the Lord's vineyard is a pretty big place; and when we find our work in one corner of it is done I guess it means there's something to do in another.' I felt awful bad, sonny—Mr. Charlie, I mean—to hear him talk like that. It was just as if he'd gone off his head. If he has, he's been drove off it—that's what I say; and there's them in St.

David's that 'll never rest till I'm drove off it, too."

Charlie Grace let himself into the house with his latch-key. Throwing his hat and bag on the old sofa in the hall, he went straight to the dining-room door. He found his father at table, a book propped up before him, while he ate his cold meat. There were few of the signs of depression about him that his own fears and Remnant's words had led him to expect. He seemed older, however, and perhaps weary.

He looked up with a start when his son had been standing some few seconds on the threshold.

"Hello, my boy! What's brought *you* here?"

"I—I—came on," the young man stammered, as they shook hands. It was all that seemed possible to say.

"No trouble, I hope? You haven't got into a scrape?"

Charlie Grace smiled dimly, shaking his head. "No; nothing of that kind."

"Then sit down and have some supper. Get yourself a plate. There's probably something you'll like better in the way of food, if you'll forage for it. I told Julia there was no need for her to stay in. Now that the poor old soul runs the house by herself, I give her as much time off as I can."

Charlie Grace returned from the pantry presently with a plate and a knife and fork for himself, some cake and a jar of milk. Having had nothing to eat since morning, he was hungry.

"Now let's have it," the rector said, as soon as his son was seated. It was plain that any cares he might have on his own account he put aside from anxiety as to this sudden appearance of the boy.

"I can't let you have it all at once," the son replied, with a repetition of his dim smile, "because there's too much to tell."

"Then begin at the beginning. Fire away."

"The beginning is that I'm not going back."

The rector laid down his knife and fork with an air of genuine dismay. "Not going back?"

"No, father."

"And may I ask why?"

"Fanny Hornblower has been in Boston—"

A queer expectant look came into the rector's face which caused his son some irritation and moved him to speak more bluntly than he had intended. "Fanny Hornblower has been in Boston. She told me what's been happening here. That settles it for me. I can't sponge on you any longer."

"Even if you can't, you've some money of your own. I'm sure your grandfather would have liked nothing better than that you should use part of it for your education. That's always a good investment—"

"Not from my point of view."

"How?—from your point of view? I suppose your point of view is like that of any one else. If you're going into the Church—"

"But I'm not."

There was a long pause before the rector said, in an awed voice, "You're not?"

"No, father, and what's more—I may as well tell you at once—I'm done with religion."

The rector stared. He took out his handkerchief and wiped his brow. "You're . . . done with . . . what?"

"I'm done with religion, father. I want to say it plainly. I've given it up."

So as not to meet his father's eyes Charlie Grace kept his own on his plate, while he ate fast and hungrily.

"What do you mean by—giving it up?"

"I'm not sure that I mean anything beyond what the words imply."

"Do you mean that you've lost faith in it?—that you think it isn't true?"

"I haven't gone into that. I don't know whether I think it's true or not. I see what it does. I see what it makes of people. That's enough for me. No; I don't suppose I think it *is* true. I shouldn't think that anything that was true could work so badly."

"You'll pardon me if I say that that's a very crude opinion—"

"I dare say it is, father. But it's the one I hold and the one I mean to live by."

There was another long silence. The young man pushed away the plate on which he had been eating cold beef, and began on cake and milk.

"And how long has this—this change in your outlook been going on?"

"In one sense, only within the last twenty-four hours. In another I see now that it's been my attitude all my life."

The rector leaned forward, his elbows on the table, and scrutinized his son. "And in the sense in which it's been going on only for the past twenty-four hours, has it—has it anything to do with me?"

Charlie Grace lifted his eyes and looked steadily at his father. "It has something to do with you, sir, in that what's happened here has given the finishing touch to showing me what a mockery the

whole thing is. In a religion of which the root-idea is love of one's neighbor every one thinks first of himself. When he thinks of his neighbor at all it's to give him a blow or a kick. I've seen a lot of it; I've suffered a lot from it, too. I don't propose to suffer any more—at least not without claiming an equal liberty for myself."

"You mean the liberty to give a blow or a kick—"

"Wherever they come in useful. Yes, father. That's just what I do mean. I fail to see any one who considers any one else in anything. I've lived in the heart of religion all my life, and I've seen as little consideration of others there as elsewhere. Certain good works of a missionary or philanthropic sort are carried on by an impersonal system that needs a good deal in the way of outside stimulus; but when it comes to the individual you can hardly get so much as pity. Look at what happened to the Brights. You've heard about Hattie, haven't you?"

The rector raised his brows in an expression of distress. "Rumors have reached me—"

"Well, I guess they're true enough. And it needn't have happened. That's my point. She'd have gone straight if it hadn't been for poverty; and it was poverty that a very little brotherly love—if there had been such a thing—could have relieved. But, you see, there *is* no such thing. There may be a pretense at it, but it betrays its hollowness the minute you put it to the test. Look at what's been happening to me at Harvard. But no; I forgot. That's something you don't know anything about. I never told you."

"Then tell me now."

"It's almost too trivial to put into words. I

shouldn't speak of it at all only that it illustrates what I'm trying to say. It's simply this—that Furny and Reggie—the two chums with whom I grew up—who've had all the influence of St. David's—your own influence, too—well, they've practically cut me for the last two years—"

"Cut you?"

"Because I wasn't rich enough—or good enough—or something. Mind you, father, that's a detail. I mention it only to show you how useless religion is when it comes to a practical bearing on the character. I'm not thinking of what we call sin—but of what to me is a good deal worse than sin—and that's meanness. I've no hesitation in saying that most of the despicable things I've seen—and I've seen a lot—and felt them—have been committed by people who keep up a fundamental connection with religion. Look at your own case. After forty years' work in the Church—after thirty years given continuously to St. David's, on what, in any other profession in the world, would have been called starvation wages, considering your position—after all that, where are you now? Kicked out without a cent. The expression is not too harsh—"

"It's too harsh in the sense that if I don't take it so bitterly I don't see why you should."

"You wouldn't take anything bitterly, father, not if it was martyrdom. I'll bet you you're thinking now how you can pardon the whole thing—"

"I should be a poor pupil of my own teaching if I were not."

"So there you are. But *I* can't pardon it. Do you see? I don't care what the reason—I don't care what the justification they may have had—the

"I MUST ASK YOU TO UNDERSTAND THAT WHAT I'VE SAID TO-NIGHT IS FINAL"

best they could do would never have offset your years of service—"

It was rare in those days to see a flush in the gray cheek of the rector of St. David's, but he flushed now with a painful burning red. "The parish has been running down, my boy. It's only fair to them to consider that. I've been sensible of it for a long time past, but I didn't know what to do. The truth is—we may as well face it—I haven't understood the conditions. Perhaps Legrand saw them better than I did. To my mind St. David's has always been St. David's—the parish I found when I came here. But everything has been changing right under my eyes, and I haven't seen it."

Charlie Grace jumped up impatiently. "Very likely. I shall be frank enough to say, father, that I think you're right. But that has nothing to do with the disloyalty—"

"Oh, loyalty has never been a strong point with us Americans. We always break our idols as soon as we cease to worship them. I don't mind that so much as—"

"So much as what, father?"

"So much as the fact of having been an unprofitable servant. It may seem rather late to come to the knowledge of it, but it's better than never. A rude awakening is preferable to none at all. I must be grateful for having had that, even if some other things are hard."

The rector pushed his chair back from the table and advanced toward the fireplace, where his son rested his elbow on the mantelpiece. They stood facing each other on the hearth-rug.

"I fail to see," the young man said, "what's to be

gained by an awakening—rude or otherwise—at this date."

The father smiled—the old tolerant smile, and yet with a new shade in it. "Yes, you would. It's probably something that no one of your age could do justice to. At twenty sixty-six must seem played out. You've got to get near to sixty-six to see how little it *is* played out. Moreover, one needs a larger experience than is possible at your age to realize the fact that no young man, however active, is equal to the old man whose mind and heart are open. I reproach myself with not having kept pace with my time as much as I might have done; but I'm good for something yet."

"You're good for a great deal yet, father; but that subject is beside the mark of what we're discussing."

"It isn't beside the mark if I find that what you consider harsh treatment isn't really as harsh as you think it. I've been talking to the bishop during the past few days, and he's been most kind—the more so since he and I haven't at all times seen eye to eye. He advises me not to hang on as rector emeritus of St. David's, and offers me the parish of Gregory's Falls."

"Gregory's—what?"

"Gregory's Falls; it's a small place—a manufacturing town—"

"*You? You*, father? In a small place? In a manufacturing town? Why, it would be an outrage."

"An outrage to work in my Master's service?—anywhere?—in any capacity? That's where you fail to understand, my boy. I don't blame you.

Perhaps I shouldn't have understood, either, before this thing came upon me. I used to consider it a fine thing to be rector of St. David's; but now—well, we won't talk about it. I only want you to know that I don't feel that sense of wounded pride that you might expect. I did. I felt it keenly during the first few hours—but it passed. It passed as soon as I—as I found myself ready to—to accept my Master's will—for any kind of work, however humble—"

The young man made a gesture of impatience. "Please, father, don't go on. I can't stand it. I don't sympathize with what you're saying. I feel nothing but the damned ingratitude of people to whom you'd have given your life. You needn't tell me you don't care—"

"Oh, but I do care. Of course I care. In a way it will be like the tearing asunder of body and soul when I actually have to leave. But I shall be equal to it. That's what I want you to see. In the warfare in which I've been engaged all these years you can feel the impact of a shock—yes, you *can* feel that—but you can't be struck down. I should be a worse soldier than I've been not to have learned that."

With his hands thrust into his trousers pockets and his head bent, Charlie Grace began pacing round the table strewn with the remains of supper. Some ten or fifteen minutes passed, during which father and son kept silence, each following his own train of thought. The younger man was near the door when he said, suddenly, "I'm going to bed."

"Perhaps that's what we'd both better do."

Charlie Grace raised his head with the customary defiant tilting of the chin. "But before I go, father,"

he pursued, "I must ask you to understand that what I've said to-night is final."

"You mean that you're going to let it all—go?"

"I'm going to let it all go. I'm over and done with it. Please don't argue with me—or try to convince me—"

"Oh dear, no, I shouldn't argue with you, my boy. But if you start out on the principle you expressed just now, of giving a blow or a kick wherever they come in useful, life itself will argue with you—will show you how little that method leads to ultimate success."

"It's the only method, as I see things, that leads to any success whatever. All our best civilized and Christian authorities adopt it—and, whatever the consequences, I'm going to do the same. I've been the exception hitherto; now I'm going to follow the rule. And the rule is—every man for himself. There's just one thing that used to hold me back—that was mama's memory; but somehow I feel that if she knew how I'd been driven into it—"

There was another long silence, during which the rector stood balancing himself on his toes and looking down at the hearth-rug, while his son kept his place by the door.

"Well, good night, father," Charlie Grace said at last.

"Good night, my boy—and God bless you! You won't mind my praying for you, will you?"

Charlie Grace turned in the hall and looked back. "I've parted company with the old ideas so completely, father, that I wish you wouldn't. But I suppose it's no use asking you not to."

The rector shook his head with a faint smile. "No; I'm afraid I can't yield to you in that."

CHAPTER XII

CHARLIE GRACE wished that his brother-in-law Tomlinson had not thought it well "to talk things over" at breakfast in the presence of Miss Penrhyn. It was not that there was any secret as to his having come to Winnipeg looking for work, but he disliked appearing before her as a suppliant. It tended to keep him in that position of inferiority which, natural as it may have been on the occasion of their first meeting, was slightly humiliating, now that he was twenty-one. He had traveled far since the afternoon at "Carmen," four years earlier, and would have been glad to impress her with the fact.

He didn't at all know what he wanted of Miss Penrhyn. In view of his youth and impecuniosity he would have scoffed at the idea of love, while flirtation in those solemn days would have seemed to lower both his dignity and hers. Something, nevertheless, he did want, and the lack of it, the impossibility of even defining it, brought the ache of uneasiness into those first days of emancipation and hope.

"So you want a billet."

A few years ago Osborne would have said "So you want a job." His use of the English vernacular, with its echo of military ways of speech, was a sign of the Anglicizing process which, through long

sojourns in England and Canada and the accumulation of interests under the British flag, was gradually transforming the Tomlinson family.

Charlie Grace was conscious of a quickening of the pulse. He had waited a week to hear his brother-in-law say just these words. During that time he had lived in an inner stillness of expectancy, tensely patient, knowing the oracle would speak when the divine afflatus moved him.

Now that the mystic moment had come, it was not ill-suited to this August morning, with the windows open to the warm and bracing prairie wind, bringing in from the unkempt garden the fragrance of verbena and mignonette. Warm and bracing was the sunshine, too, pervading the room, from the treeless, shadeless world outside. Through the muslin curtains flapping in the breeze one had glimpses of a town suggesting the first chalk sketch of a future masterpiece. Seen by an eye which was not that of faith, the Winnipeg streets had the ugliness pertaining to most things in the making, but as a matter of fact no one in 1889 lived in the Winnipeg that actually was. Even the new-comer felt himself a dweller in the City of Destiny, modeled on Chicago or the New Jerusalem, according to personal ideals, and likely to outdo both. Discomfort and crudeness were then but as dust beneath the feet of conquerors.

Not that there was any discomfort in the house Osborne Tomlinson had rented for the summer from a colleague absent in England, or much in the way of crudeness, though the furnishings were indicative of that meeting of alien civilizations which the Trans-Canadian had made possible. Heavy mahoganies and antiquated reps, drifted from mid-Victorian

England or eastern Canada, found themselves here, on the virginal prairie, mingling in a common task of decoration and utility with Japanese prints, Chinese screens, and the nameless hues of Corean potteries. The fact that on this soil, unstained as yet by the blood and traditions of men, each had a right to its place negatived incongruity as easily as when the fuchsias and dahlias and bleeding-hearts of the Mongolian hills came to bloom beside the pansies and pinks of the English cottage-garden. In the center of the table a mass of nasturtiums arranged by Hilda Penrhyn in a dull-green bowl from Seoul was like a reunion of once intimate but long separated friends.

"So you want a billet."

The fact that the subject had at last become a living issue wrought an immediate change in the group about the table. Emma went on pouring out the coffee with the intensified composure which was her sign of self-consciousness. Sophy lifted her tousled fair head like a kitten lapping milk; Hilda Penrhyn, after a look from her clear brown eyes at the young man across the table, applied herself to peeling an orange daintily. In spite of his preoccupation with Osborne's words Charlie Grace returned the look, and even took time to speak of it to himself as a "concession." He meant that it was the first sign of interest she had displayed in him during the whole week he had been at Winnipeg.

Osborne knocked off the top of an egg before speaking again. "I do know of a place—at Forde," he barked. "Can have it if you like and can do the work."

Charlie Grace threw back his head in the attitude

with which they were all familiar. "I can do it unless it's something that demands a lot of experience and technical skill. I'm pretty good as a Jack-of-all-trades."

"Thought you might be. That's why I speak of the place at Forde. Post in which you'd have everything to do, and nothing in particular. Nominally you'd be storekeeper, but really you'd have to be everything between night-watchman and superintendent."

Sophy lifted her fluffy head. "But that's what you said to Mr. Mullins, father."

"So I did. Saying it again."

"But is it the same position you offered Mr. Mullins?"

"Told him about it. Didn't offer it."

"But I know he expects it," Sophy persisted, "because poor Mrs. Mullins told me so. She said what a godsend it was going to be to them—with so many children—and everything."

"Mullins could have had it if Charlie hadn't turned up. Now *he* can have it—if he wants it."

"Oh, don't take it, Charlie," Sophy begged. "They're so awfully poor, you know, and they've had the most frightful luck ever since they came out from England. Mrs. Mullins said this was going to put them on their feet."

There was a minute's silence, during which the young man's eyes again met Hilda Penrhyn's across the table. He had the satisfaction of seeing that in hers there was a question. He took it as a challenge to him to make good the principles by which he meant to live. There was every reason, he considered, why he should not back down.

"I'll take it," he said, briefly.

"Oh, Charlie!" Sophy wailed. "I'm ashamed of you. A married man with a family—"

"Sophy, how you talk," Emma put in. "You can't take things of that kind into account in business. If your father had done so *you* wouldn't be where you are to-day—going abroad with Hilda. It's no use saying you would be, because you wouldn't. If you didn't try to get ahead of people before they get ahead of you the world would come to a standstill. It *has* to be that way."

"Well, I don't care," Sophy insisted. "It isn't a bit nice of Charlie—not when Mrs. Mullins was counting on it to get them out of debt—and everything."

"Oh, something will turn up for Mr. Mullins," the mother said, complacently. "Your father won't forget them."

"Anyhow, I call it beastly," Sophy declared, pushing away her plate and leaving the room.

Osborne took on an inscrutable air, like a bulldog turned Fate. It was impossible to tell what he thought of the moral issues involved in his young brother-in-law's decision, and the latter had so far asserted his independence of judgment that he didn't care. He searched, however, for some sign of Miss Penrhyn's opinion, but found none. Trying again to catch her glance, he saw nothing but her lowered lids—lids of which the ivory deepened to bister along the curved fringe of the lashes. He attached no importance to the fact that her expression had grown grave, since, in his experience, she smiled rarely. When she did, the smile came slowly and dreamily, as though prompted less by outward

happenings than by inward thoughts. Nevertheless, there was in her gravity now—or at least he thought so—an element of detachment not so much disdainful as infinitely remote. He felt that for an instant she had approached him, only to withdraw as from something too alien for contact. She didn't put him at a distance; she left him where he was; she simply retreated, as a spirit that has made itself visible for a space goes back into the unseen.

He got nothing at all from studying her face. Owing to the preoccupation of Osborne and Emma with their breakfast, he could observe her intently. For the hundredth time during his week at Winnipeg he used the same adjectives to describe her features. He said to himself that they were mysterious, pure, and firm. In an effort at analysis he tried to see the firmness in the quiet set of the lips and in the line by which the cheeks, their *mat* tint darkened by summer sunburn, descended to the chin. The purity was everywhere. It was not in one detail more than in another—not in the low, broad forehead, with its waving, simply parted, nut-brown hair, not in the straight little nose, not in the nut-brown eyes that seemed to view you from a distance, to see you without taking note of you. The purity, he thought, was not so much an expression as an aura, a defense that challenged a man to push through and break it down. And as for the mystery, he placed it in the impression she conveyed of coming from strange countries storied and remote, of knowing strange secrets, holy and profane, of luring to strange joys and strange woes not to be expressed in any of the terms of common human intercourse, of carrying such a weight of the wisdom

and pain and passion of the world as to be incapable of wholly entering on the round of common human fellowship. As he saw her she stood only on the threshold of such a life as he and others lived—a strayed princess from another time—a time not modern, nor yet medieval, nor yet of the ancient world. To his imagination she was dateless, ageless, soulless—but bringing, in her aloofness and silences and slow, lingering glances, messages, and perhaps rebukes, from far-off spiritual kingdoms.

What he chiefly wanted was to dispute with her, to beat the questions he felt to be lying tacitly between them out in words. He resented her method of mutely condemning him. He wanted not merely to convince her, but to coerce her. His attitude was all antagonism—and yet an antagonism like that of the flesh toward the spirit, crying out in one breath for victory and self-subduction.

All he could do was to watch her. He noticed her hands, small and shapely, exquisitely modeled at the wrists. He noticed the way she ate, with a leisure and a daintiness that reduced eating as nearly as possible to the non-material. He noticed her dress —a white muslin thing, of which the outline of the "basque" defined her slenderness.

"Make it clear to yourself that it's a place in which you'll have to work like a dog," Osborne said, after some minutes of silence.

"I guess I can do that as well as any one else."

"You'll be called storekeeper, as I've said. But if the chief clerk has to go out on the road you'll have to sit at the big desk and transact business. If the cashier is called East you'll have to keep his accounts. If the telegraph-boy falls sick you'll have to know

how to take or send a message. If the train-master drops dead you'll have to despatch the trains. D' ye see? We can't specialize yet on the Trans-Canadian. That's why we're offering to young fellows like you—provided you're willing to work day and night, and not look for extra pay—the biggest opening on God's earth. Everything's open—and all you require in the way of qualification"—he tapped his forehead—"is right here."

Charlie Grace nodded at Osborne's different points to express his comprehension and willingness. He explained how, acting on hints from Emma, he had spent the weeks since leaving Harvard studying bookkeeping and picking up some knowledge of telegraphy. Emma had told him how this one and that one had got their first real start through some chance bit of usefulness of the kind. Everything was grist to the mill of the Trans-Canadian.

"And there's one thing more," Osborne pursued. "At Forde you'll come under the eye of a man who can be to you like God. Your own fault if he doesn't promote you in time to something better. That's why Mullins will be so sick. Sophy was right there. He thought that Forde would be straight on the way to glory. Well, Mullins knows."

Charlie Grace looked steadily at Miss Penrhyn. Her lids were lowered again, but at Osborne's words a little tremor passed over them. It was as much in defiance of what he took to be her judgment as in self-assertion that he said, with a nervous laugh:

"I'm sorry for Mullins; but—I'll take the job."

"Then that's settled. Have to be at Forde by the middle of September. Give you time to attend to something else I want to speak about."

Brushing the crumbs from his white waistcoat, Osborne got up and lit his morning cigar. Emma and Miss Penrhyn left the room together. Charlie Grace remained at the table, his chair tilted backward and his hands clasped behind his head, as he wondered what was coming next. Osborne inspected a line of Japanese prints, in plain cedar frames, hung on a level with his own eyes. To the younger man, who had glanced at them casually, they were unmeaning spots of color, representing elongated ladies in strange draperies, or beggars on lonely mountain roads, or queerly rigged sampans sailing unearthly seas. He smiled to himself, as he caught Osborne's expression in profile, to see the puzzled concentration in the latter's gaze. He might have been an early Egyptologist trying to decipher hieroglyphics to which he possessed no key.

"Got 'em from an old Japanee at Victoria," Osborne explained, over his shoulder. "Buy a few from him every time I go out there. Doing it for years. Lot more stowed away in the house in Minnesaba. Can't make much out of 'em, and yet they're wonderful. Know they are. That's a Hiroshige," he continued, pointing to a line of foot-passengers hurrying in a shower of rain across a wooden bridge; "and that's the best impression—the lady with the embroidered robes. She's a Utemaro. And that," he went on, "is the rarest of the lot—that grotesque old head. Find out more about 'em before I've done. Didn't I understand," he continued, abruptly, "that you had some money?"

The young man let his chair descend to rest on its four legs. "I've six thousand three hundred dollars. Don't you remember? You wrote me about

it. You told me to sell the seven bonds that came to me from my grandfather's estate and deposit the money in the Bank of Montreal. Well, I've done that."

Osborne turned slowly from the contemplation of his prints. "There's a lot of land at the corner of Higgins Street and Prince Albert Avenue. Go and buy it. Tell Hastings & Hastings I sent you. Tell 'em you'll give four thousand dollars."

"But I thought that's just what you warned me against—wildcat speculation in real estate—"

"There's another lot at the corner of Assiniboine Avenue and Lorne Street. Can get it for two thousand. Buy that. Hold 'em both till I tell you to sell. Tell Hastings & Hastings who y'are. Say I sent you. They'll know. Ask for Jimmy Hastings. Don't talk to any one else. Tell him it's me. Go to Andrew Grant—the fellow who was here the other night—to fix up your title-deeds. Find his office over the Royal Alexandra Bank in Main Street. Tell him I sent you. He'll know who y'are. Don't put it off. Do it this morning." The great man strolled to the door.

"I say, Osborne," Charlie Grace said, nervously, "you think it's all right for me to take that place away from Mullins, don't you?"

Osborne stopped in the doorway. "Do *you?*"

The young man spoke aggressively. "I do."

"Then that settles it."

"I do, because I've yet to see any one who considers any one else in—"

"Don't want to know your reasons. Got nothing to do with me. If you want the job you can have it.

All I'm concerned with. Anything else is for you to fix up with yourself. No more to be said about it."

Charlie Grace was not so preoccupied with the novelty of buying land, and thus taking the first step on his road to wealth, as to be diverted from asking Sophy, later in the day, how she liked the idea of going abroad with Hilda and Mrs. Penrhyn. Sophy shrugged her shoulders, looking up with big eyes from under her tangle of fair hair.

"Better than nothing, you know."

"And by nothing you mean—"

"Well, I can't spend my life dragging round the Northwest—now, can I? We leave here at the end of next month to go to Calgary, or Medicine Hat, or somewhere. Then it 'll probably be Queen Charlotte, or Victoria, or perhaps home for a few weeks to Minnesaba. Then it 'll be up and off again. I can't go on like that, don't you see? It doesn't give me a chance; and I'm nearly twenty-one—the same age as you."

"Chance for what?"

Sophy reflected. "It's mother's word. I suppose she means chance to get married."

He took the opportunity to go to the point in which he was really interested. "Well, it hasn't done Miss Penrhyn much good, has it?"

Sophy twitched, with a significant expression in both her face and her shoulders. "Oh, well, it wouldn't, you know."

"No, I don't know. Why wouldn't it?"

"Can't you see? She isn't interested in *men*."

"Not in any men?"

"Not in any that I ever heard of—and I should be

pretty sure to hear. Poor Mrs. Penrhyn is in despair about it. She's told me lots of times."

"What did she tell you—exactly?"

"Oh, nothing—only how Hilda goes on. I must say I don't think it's very grateful of her, if you want to know. I don't call it gratitude—when Mrs. Penrhyn takes so much pains—to look at a man—who's really attracted to you, you know—as if you didn't see him."

"Is that what she does?"

"Can't you see it's what she does?"

"I can see it's what she does to me; but I thought I might be an exception."

"You're not. I don't suppose she thinks enough about you to make you an exception. She's as good as told me that she hardly knows you're in the house."

"She must have noticed me, to tell you that much."

"I said she'd as *good* as told me; and she's as good as told me by never mentioning you at all—not once in the whole week you've been here. Any other girl would have talked of you every night after we'd gone up-stairs."

"I bet you she will to-night. She'll want to tell you how mean she thinks I've been about Mullins."

"Oh no, she won't. She knows I think you're a pig, and she thinks so herself. She'll let it go at that. If she had anything nice to say of you she might say it—she *might* do that—but she'd never say anything nasty."

"She'd keep that to herself—and just think it."

"Oh, don't ask me what she'd think. Ask *her*—and even then you won't know."

With regard to this, however, Charlie Grace was determined to see for himself. Noticing, toward the end of the afternoon, that Miss Penrhyn was setting out for a walk, he resolved to go with her.

It was a moment on his part of special audacity. The fact that during the day he had successfully bargained for his two lots of land made for elation. He felt that at last he had begun to live.

And yet he was not so bold as deliberately to overtake her. His expedient was to slip out by another way, and after skirting a few blocks of the skeleton town come upon her apparently by accident at a corner. Through streets outlined as yet only by rough plank sidewalks and tottering telegraph-poles, and still overgrown with yellow-burr and blazing-star, it was not difficult to keep her in sight. She wore the muslin dress of the morning, her costume being completed now by a white hat with a touch of green in it and a white parasol. He observed that she walked with the smooth, unaccentuated grace that marked all her movements.

His stratagem was so far successful that when he appeared suddenly she greeted him with a faint smile of surprise. Though his heart had pounded as he lifted his hat, he recovered himself quickly, being endowed with the readiness native to men with the instinct to dominate women. In the presence of others he was awkwardly conscious of her superiority; but now that he was alone with her he could take the lead.

The odd contrasts surrounding them afforded an easy theme for conversation. They spoke of the incongruity between the straggling young city, so raw, so forlorn, and its imperial hopes. They

accounted for the emptiness of the streets by the absence at the harvest of every one who could do manual work. They pointed out to each other the golden wheat-fields surrounding the town like a nimbus. They speculated as to whether Winnipeg could ever grow into the rival of the great wheat-cities south of the border, or the Trans-Canadian become the instrument of empire and civilization enthusiasts dreamed of. They noted the queer change in Osborne Tomlinson, his general development in proportion to his growing success, his English tendencies, his incipient connoisseurship. They talked of Sophy, and the rootless life she had lived, drifting from one new town to another, now on the American and now on the Canadian side of the frontier. Miss Penrhyn explained how she and her mother had crossed the Atlantic on purpose to take Sophy under their wing and give her a winter in Europe. Mrs. Penrhyn had remained at Montreal, where the young ladies were to join her, and sail for Liverpool as soon as the Tomlinsons' tenure of the house in Winnipeg was ended.

They came to the Red River. It ran through so deep a cutting that the water was not visible till they were actually on the brink. On reaching the middle of the bridge they paused to look at a small steamer rounding the curve below them, between the city proper and St. Boniface. The paddle-wheel was at the stern, and as the little craft thrashed its way along it trailed a series of gleaming cascades behind it. Just now they were golden cascades, catching the rays of the westering sun across the infinite prairie.

"I suppose you think I'm a brute to take that

place at Forde?" Charlie Grace said, suddenly, plunging into the subject he had most at heart.

She closed her parasol. She seemed very erect and dignified as she stood with hands resting sedately on the handle of the sunshade. Glancing back at her obliquely, as he leaned over the parapet of the bridge, he saw her color faintly. The accident emboldened him; it brought her, as it were, across the threshold and more fully into the life with which he was familiar.

"What does it matter what I think?" she asked, at last. The low voice had an alto richness; the enunciation the clear precision of English rather than American ways of speech. Having reflected further, she added, "The only point of importance is what you think yourself."

"I know what I think myself. But what you think matters a great deal."

"I don't see why."

"But if I do it's the main thing."

She smiled. "It may be the main thing to you."

"It's the main thing to us both, since it's a reason for your answering my question."

"But if I did answer it what good would it do? Would it tell you anything you don't know?"

He raised himself, wheeling round so as to face her. "Then you do think me a brute?"

She looked at him mildly for a second or two before saying, "Perhaps it means that I'd rather you drew your own conclusions."

"I don't see much good in that," he argued, "when you're right here on the spot to tell me."

She smiled again. "But I can't see why I *should* tell you."

"I can. You'd be doing me a kindness."

As she declined to take this challenge up, they left the bridge and strolled on into St. Boniface, passing a group of ecclesiastical buildings and continuing out into the prairie. All was gold-green. Gold-green were the fields stretching into the horizon with an undulation like that of the sea. Gold-green was the western sky, with the sun sinking as if to the rim of the world. Gold-green were the dragon-flies darting across the pathway.

In the foreground, on the edge of the prairie, was an encampment of half-breeds, occupying a stretch of land that had not yet been brought under cultivation. Goldenrod, higher and yellower than any they had ever seen, grew right up to the wigwam doors. Blue smoke from a camp-fire, round which young squaws were seated, rose into the windless air. A half-breed woman was dipping water from a pool edged with prairie-clover and magenta fireweed. A red-tailed hawk circled overhead, and from somewhere near by came the tsip-tsip of a yellow warbler. Hobbled horses were grazing. A team of tired oxen fed while their driver lay under the wagon and smoked. Farther away cattle were being driven in for milking. Beyond the camp the brown roofs of a row of barracks, above which the Union Jack hung lazily, made a straight line against the sky. Still farther in the distance long trains of ox-carts were coming in from the country with a low moan of creaking wheels. A procession of Oblate nuns could be seen on their way to a prairie shrine, of which the bell was tinkling the "Angelus."

Miss Penrhyn and Charlie Grace came to a standstill not far from the encampment.

"It's all gold," the young man laughed; "all money."

"That's the pity of it, isn't it?—that it has to be taken so."

"How else would you take it? It's been waiting here for eons of years just for this—that we in our day should come and make money out of it."

Her brown eyes sought his frankly. "Is that all you think of?—making money?"

"It's all I'm going to think of—for a long time to come. I *have* thought of other things—"

"And—"

"And I got left," he said, laconically.

"Aren't there worse things in the world than what you call getting left?"

"You could probably answer that question better if you'd ever had the experience. I shouldn't want you to have it—and yet if you'd had it you might understand me a little better."

She hesitated a minute before saying, "How do you know I don't understand you pretty well as it is?"

"I know it because if you did you wouldn't look at me as you do."

He half expected her to resent this, but she only said, "You mean with distrust?"

He started slightly. He looked hurt. "I *meant* disapproval. You distrust me, then?"

"Doesn't that bring us back to where we were a few minutes ago?—your asking me questions I see no necessity to answer."

"But if I feel the necessity of knowing?"

"Oh, but you can't. Why should you?"

The directness of these words embarrassed him.

"I might feel such a need," he said, after reflection, "without being able to explain it. You do distrust me?"

She seemed to search for her words. "Since you insist on knowing—I should think you might be unscrupulous."

"Because I've taken the job Mullins might have had?"

"That's only one reason. I judge from lots of little things you've said since you've been here. You strike me as likely to be the more unscrupulous because you're not so by nature. You choose to be so. You do it deliberately—"

"I don't call it unscrupulous just to do what other people do."

"Wouldn't that depend on the people?"

"One has to take the world as one finds it. When I say people I mean people as I've known them. And I fail to see any one who considers any one else in anything. The more they pretend to the less they do it. I'm only singular in being frank. And as for this Mullins business, why, haven't I a right to consider my family as much as he to think of his?"

"Your family?"

"My father, then. I've got to take care of him. At least, I shall have, as soon as I'm able to do it. You know he's been kicked out, don't you—that the good Christian people he's served for thirty years have turned him loose on the world, practically without a cent?"

Her face showed her surprise. "No; I didn't understand it in that way. Cousin Emma told me he'd resigned St. David's in order to go and work in a

factory-town among the poor. I thought it very noble of him—"

"That's Emma's way of putting it," he scoffed, "but it's not as noble as it looks. Under my father the parish was running down, and they wanted a younger and more active man. That's the plain English of it. I don't know that I can blame them altogether. What I do blame is the system—a system by which a man can give his life to a cause and be left in his old age without adequate provision. The most worldly of secular concerns would give an old servant a decent pension. Oh yes; they *have* offered my father something—but so little that he's felt it more dignified to refuse it. I agree with him, too, even if he'd have to starve. And it's going to be hard with the poor old chap. He tries to make the best of it—but it's no go. He was packing his books when I came away. I wouldn't have left him only that he didn't seem to want me looking on. I can understand that, too. You can let your heart break more easily alone. And if he had money it would be different. He could snap his fingers at the lot of them. You see, the whole trouble lies there. If he'd had money I don't suppose they would have turned him out. You feel differently toward a poor man from what you do toward a rich one. The good poor man doesn't stand a chance as compared with the rich bad one; and it's so in the eyes of every one, from the pope and the archbishop downward. This is no new discovery; it's only new to me. What I want to guard against is a repetition in my own case of what's happened to my father. I want to be where others will be at my beck and call instead of my being at theirs, and so—"

"And so you won't allow Mr. Mullins to stand in your way."

"Neither Mr. Mullins nor any one else—when I can sweep him out of it. Since it's a question of his sweeping me or my sweeping him, I'll do the latter when I can."

"But there are people in the world who do think of others."

"I may think of others, too—after I've got rich. They must wait till then."

"But by that time you may have lost the capacity. One *can* lose it. I don't think I should like to be at your mercy when you've lived according to your present theories long enough to grow rich."

He laughed. "Oh, I should be at your mercy—whatever happened."

"Fortunately, nothing can happen; but if it could—"

"You'd be afraid of me?"

"I'm afraid of you now," she smiled, turning away from her contemplation of the sunset, which by this time covered half the sky with rose and gold, and beginning to move back toward the town.

BOOK II

CHAPTER I

CHARLIE GRACE never had a chance to take up the thread of the foregoing conversation till he went back to New York for Sophy's wedding, in 1897. During the intervening years Miss Penrhyn had remained abroad, while he continued to live at Forde, watching the prairie station become a town, and the town grow into a city. He was now manager of the Forde, Regina & St. Paul—one of the new feeders of the Trans-Canadian. He had enemies who declared that at his age he would never have attained to this position had he not been brother-in-law to the great Osborne Tomlinson, though he didn't lack friends who pointed to his success in organization and his capacity for work as sufficient reason for his rise. He himself took this kind of criticism, whether for or against himself, with the indifference of the man growing strong enough to despise it.

"And yet I feel," he admitted to Emma, during the first morning he spent with her in New York, "as though much of the incentive to work had gone, now that we've lost poor father."

"Poor father!" Emma sighed. "He's better off, isn't he?"

"I hope so—if he's anything. He couldn't have been worse off, for an old man like him. It used to make my blood boil to go and see him in that dog-

kennel at Gregory's Falls. If he could have risen to the level of his own faith it would have been something. But he couldn't, poor old chap. By the time ill luck came upon him it was too late to make himself over. I see a lot of that sort in the northwest. He was about as well fitted for a factory-town as he would have been to manage the Forde, Regina & St. Paul. He said to me one day, not long before he died, that at Gregory's Falls he was like a chapter of the *Judicious Hooker* read out to a mothers' meeting. He always had a dry kind of humor—poor old father. But that was it exactly. He was the rector of St. David's till the very end."

He paced up and down the long white-and-gold drawing-room of the house Emma and Osborne had taken for the winter in one of the streets running out of Fifth Avenue, east of the Park. Emma sat in her low Louis Seize arm-chair, looking about her with pride in even a temporary possession of so dignified a *pied-à-terre*. Eight years had rendered her a little stouter and brought some gray into her black hair, but had otherwise left her unchanged. As the wife of a man on whom wealth beyond his calculation was beginning to pour in she made it a point to seem as little aware as possible of a change in fortune by being more dignified, more composed.

Not having seen her brother since the day of their father's funeral over a year ago, Emma noted with satisfaction the degree in which he was fulfilling her early predictions as to his appearance. In calling him a handsome fellow she paid tribute to certain qualities in him that woman found disquieting, and for which she had no ready supply of terms. Romance would have said too much, and fascination

too little, for her meaning; and yet he had a way of regarding a woman—of regarding her aslant and from above—that troubled the imagination. It was not that his eyes were fine; they were small, deep-set, and caverned beneath bushy brows, fair in color and irregular in line; but in talking to women, their cold blue responded to some inner stirring to grow earnestly intent or langorously gentle according to the mood inspired. It was a common thing for women to fancy that he was wholly or partially in love with them. The hair was crisp and fair—of the degree of fairness inadequately described as the lightest shade of brown—pushing thickly back from a high forehead, not brushlike, but in incorrigible undulations. The tan on the long face, that might look gaunt in illness or sorrow, was that of bronze superimposed on a healthy Saxon red. The rector of St. David's had bequeathed to his son the high-bridged nose that Emma, too, sported on a smaller scale, though in the case of the son the thin straight nostrils quivered at the touch of anger or enthusiasm, like those of a sensitive horse. From the rector had come also the drooping compressed mouth, of which the young man tempered the severity with a long fair mustache, pliant enough to yield readily to the brush, and sweep upward from the lips. Strapping, straight, clean-hipped, clean-limbed, strongly built but spare of flesh, carrying himself proudly, he swung up and down the drawing-room like a man for whom anything indoors is too small. Responsibility, life in the open, and the habit of commanding subordinates had given him, so Emma thought, an authority of manner that increased his actual age by eight or ten years.

"And I hear they're not doing very well at St. David's, after all," she sighed. "The new man—Mr. Bateman—is a good worker, and yet the old families keep moving away. I've heard that if Mr. Bateman goes, as he very likely will, they'll try to get Rufus Legrand. Even if poor father had stayed he'd have had a great deal of trouble; so perhaps everything has been for the best."

Charlie Grace was disinclined to this cheerful resignation. He spoke bitterly. "I wanted to put him where he could have held up his head again—where he could have got in his lick of revenge on those who worked him out. I shouldn't have minded if it had been no better than the coals-of-fire business, so long as it was something. If he had only lived another year I could have managed it, too. I could manage it now. I'd give a lot to have him swelling it with me at the Waldorf, and letting his enemies see he was bigger than they are. Ah, well! It's no use going over the old ground too often. Tell me about this prospective son-in-law of yours," he went on, with a change of tone. "It seems queer to think of little Sophy as a married woman, though, by George, she's getting on. She's twenty-eight—like me. But I'm nearer twenty-nine."

The theme to which she was invited was one in which Emma could display her gift for taking honors lightly. Sophy's marriage was not brilliant, but it *was* satisfactory. Mr. Colet was only a younger son, with at least two or three lives between him and the earldom; but Osborne and she, Emma, had no desire for position in itself. The young couple would begin life at Ottawa, where Mr. Colet had a billet under the government. This was the

more convenient in that Mr. and Mrs. Tomlinson themselves might be obliged, for a time at any rate, to make Ottawa their home. Emma had hesitated to break the news to her brother by letter, knowing how badly he would feel about it, but there was every likelihood of Osborne's being naturalized as a British subject. Emma herself was heartbroken. She wouldn't have minded so much if Osborne were to become a genuine Englishman, but a Canadian was only half-and-half. It was a matter of money, however. Her brother would see that, and understand that it overruled all hesitations. There were political reasons why Noddy couldn't become a director—and perhaps one day president—of the Trans-Canadian while remaining a foreigner. It had been freely whispered that his name would have appeared in the last list of birthday honors if he hadn't still been an American. There was Billy Short—now Sir William Short—born and brought up on an Indiana farm! Charlie ought to see his collection of jades. It was simply extraordinary—the taste developed by purely self-made men! There were so many instances of it! Yes; Noddy was still collecting Japanese prints, but that was not quite the same thing, was it? Noddy might be a self-made man in a way—but only in a way. He had had advantages from the start—was connected with some of the oldest families in New York—the Penrhyns, for instance—whereas Billy Short—well, it was simply ridiculous that he should become an authority on anything but locomotives. And *à propos*—that reminded Emma—how would Charlie like eventually to go as second in command to Mr. Purvis in New York?

Charlie Grace came to a dead stop in front of his sister. "Second in command to Mr. Purvis in New York!"

"Oh, not just yet. I said eventually. The old man won't have any one yet. He's been approached on the subject, and he simply won't. Naturally, after all he's done for the Trans-Canadian they can't force any one on him, can they? But he can't go on many years longer alone. Noddy says it would be disastrous—and they *must* have an American."

"Did Osborne mention me?"

"Not in so many words; but I could tell by the way he looked. He only said that that Sir William Short had his eye on Ellis, and it seemed to me a pity to let Ellis have it if—"

"If I can put a spoke in his wheel," he said, with a short laugh.

"Well, *could* you?"

"I suppose I could if I tried. You can generally put a spoke in any one's wheel if you go the right way to work about it. I've had lots put in mine."

"But would you care for the place?—New York, I mean. You'd have to play second fiddle at first, of course; but that would help you to get your hand in. Poor old Mr. Purvis can't live forever—he simply can't—and then— And they *do* want an American."

Charlie Grace resumed his tramp up and down the drawing-room, trying to hold his head loftily and give an impression of indifference.

"It would seem like two-by-six, after the wide life in the north," he said; "but I suppose one would get used to that. I've always meant to come back to New York some day—but only when I'd made my pile."

"You're doing pretty well, at that, aren't you?—especially with so many irons in the fire."

He smiled and nodded. "I can't complain—thanks to Osborne."

"Well, would you like New York or not? I don't want to—to—to take any steps—if you'd refuse it in the end."

He considered a moment, pausing again before her. "If you can do anything for me, do it. In the mean time I shall take care of Ellis, so that he sha'n't be in my way when the time comes—in case I want the job."

Emma laughed. "You're just like Noddy."

"I'm just like any man who means to get on," he answered, grimly. "Success is like warfare. If you don't knife the other fellow he'll knife you. There's no sentiment about it, and no quarter. And it's no use thinking the other fellow will hold back if you do, because he won't. For anything I know Ellis is out gunning for me now on this very business. He certainly is, if he's had the tip."

"It's dreadful, isn't it?" Emma said, sympathetically. "But so true. I've often heard Noddy say that the very man he's tried to spare is the one who'd take the first opportunity to let him have it in the neck. That's Noddy's expression, of course. It's too bad, isn't it? But it has to be that way—it simply *has*."

Charlie Grace threw himself into a chair. "It hasn't to be that way," he declared, harshly. "It's that way only because we're a lot of cutthroats."

"Charlie, how you talk!"

"It's a frightful business, really. As I see things, we're on the way to a reign of selfishness more ap-

palling than anything the world has ever known. It's going to be every man for himself in the most literal sense of the phrase; and once you get that rule established it means the downfall of civilization."

"Charlie, how you talk! It's always been like that."

"It's always been like that as a tendency of which human nature was ashamed—and the shame was the saving element. But we're no longer ashamed of it. We've recognized it openly as the law of life. We're living by it. And so, instead of being men, we're degenerating into a race of wolves. We're worse than wolves in that we're hypocrites as well. We're like the Pharisees, who devoured widows' houses and for a pretense made long prayers. We may not make the long prayers, but we do other things just as disgustingly insincere—and, as the Bible says, my people love to have it so."

"But, Charlie, you're doing it yourself!"

He stretched out his long legs, thrusting his hands deep into his trousers pockets. "Perfectly true. I'm doing it myself because we're coming to a time—and by the look of things the United States will reach it first—when the human race will be divided into just two sections—the oppressors and the oppressed. As I've no taste for being the oppressed, I jump into the boat with the oppressors. It's an act of self-preservation."

Emma rose, dismissing the subject, as she said with a smile: "I know you don't believe a word of what you're saying. Well, I must go to my work. And, by the by, you'll come to dinner to-night, won't you? Nobody but ourselves, and Frank Colet, and Mrs. Penrhyn and Hilda."

He took the opportunity to say, as he sat with legs still outstretched, "So Miss Penrhyn is still—Miss Penrhyn."

Emma turned in the doorway, smiling enigmatically. "Yes; and likely to remain so."

"Whose fault is that?"

"Oh, hers, entirely. She's had plenty of chances—at least, she might have if she didn't scare people off. And, by the way, if you *should* go as second to Mr. Purvis I hope they'll come back here to live. You'd find them awfully useful. Everything is open to them, even though they've so little money. If Hilda were to marry a man of means she could put him where she liked in New York."

Fortunately, she went before the slow flush mounted to his cheek. He speculated as to how far her words were accidental—wondering whether she had divined the extent to which the social conquest of New York had remained his secret ambition. He didn't see how she could have divined it, since he had kept the longing locked in his own breast; but she had an uncanny power of reading him. He was sorry, too, that she had spoken of the Penrhyns' social influence. He was sufficiently aware of it already. His father's commendation of years ago, "No better blood in New York," had always remained a disturbing recollection. It was disturbing because it introduced an element of common snobbishness into the realm of his ideals. Were he not obliged to recognize an element of common snobbishness in himself he would have shrunk less from this suggestion.

As for Hilda Penrhyn, he had endeavored, during five of the past eight years, to banish her from his

thoughts. It was not that other women took her place there so much as that into a life where so many other women entered he held it unfitting to summon her even mentally. In this respect he was now of an age and in a position to judge himself; and he judged himself—when he came to a frank statement of the facts—as weak, susceptible, inconstant.

For two or three years after settling at Forde he had been tolerably firm in the principles by which he had lived hitherto. As a young man who had once had lofty aims it had been a matter of pride with him to think that he had kept the substance of religion even in renouncing the formulæ. Argument combined with the innate purity of youth to strengthen him in this attitude, till argument found itself too noticeably inconsistent with his other views of life. Having acquired a habit of doing as he pleased, it began to seem unreasonable to draw an arbitrary line. Little by little he felt himself drifting toward new conclusions when, for the first time, he fell passionately in love.

The lady in the case was a dashing Englishwoman, temporarily at Forde while her husband was out on the survey for the Forde, Regina & St. Paul. Charlie Grace grew tired of his romance long before circumstances brought it to an end. There followed a few weeks of remorse and self-disgust. The return of the husband—a kindly, companionable fellow—to Forde, with the necessity of being on good terms with him, was the most trying experience up to the present in the young man's life. He took it so seriously as to go back for a time to the old ways of thinking. For two or three Sundays he attended church; and once or twice he actually tried to

stumble through prayers. He gave up these attempts through sheer uncertainty as to what he wanted to pray for and from the dread of being insincere.

Time, however, healed the wounds to conscience, and after the second episode of the sort he felt fewer regrets. After the third he felt none at all. After the fourth he smiled at himself for his former misgivings. Life became finally emancipated, free.

But it was a freedom in which there was no place for Hilda Penrhyn. He understood himself clearly with regard to her. If she represented anything in his life it was adhesion to the principles he had given up. If he desired anything of her it was capitulation to his later ideas. If there was any spiritual kinship between them it was kinship with what he had been rather than with the man he had become. He resented that. It was as if she were still sitting in silent judgment on him, as she had judged him silently that day at Winnipeg. When he permitted himself to think of her at all it was with persistent uneasiness to convince her that he was right. So long as she remained unconvinced she was like his old self risen again; and to that specter his antagonism increased with time.

That night at dinner he found himself seated at the table beside Mrs. Penrhyn, who was unexpectedly gracious.

"It's such a pleasure to me to meet you, Mr. Grace," she said, speaking slowly, with some effort, as though speech were a tax on her strength. "It's really one I never expected to have. Each time I cross the Atlantic now I think will be the last—I mean when I cross this way. And you never come to Europe, do you?"

"It's something I haven't done yet; but I hope to get the time off next year, or the year after, at latest."

"You'll find it a wonderful experience. And when you do come I hope we may have the pleasure of seeing you. In winter we're generally at Nice—the air suits me. In summer we wander, but dear Emma can always tell you where we are. Do let us see you. We couldn't do much to amuse you beyond introducing you to a few people. But they'd be interesting people, of the right sort. I can promise you that."

It was impossible for him not to glow with some inward pride. This was recognition—acceptance. It was something more, since it was indorsement of his methods. She wouldn't have spoken in this way had he not grown strong and successful, likely to grow stronger and more successful still. It was as though the great world were offering to open its gates. In her casual way of mentioning illustrious names those gates seemed ajar already. A great painter had said this to her, a great singer had said that, a great statesman had said another thing. To an ambitious young fellow, whose obscure youth had been followed by eight years in the Canadian northwest, there was a thrill in this mental proximity. It was the first taste of a draught for which he had been born thirsty.

He began to understand the reverence in which Osborne and Emma held their charming kinswoman. If in no other way, it was called out by her manner of speaking with authority—a gentle manner, slightly infused with hauteur, like that of a regnant queen, conscious of being the source of honor. Moreover,

she had the impressiveness of remarkable beauty, fading to decay. Tall, slender, graceful, pale, with large, hollow, mournful eyes, she appealed to the imagination. Out of the relatively meager materials supplied by the death of Mr. Penrhyn leaving a small instead of a large estate his widow had created a drama of dethronement that never failed of its effect in the cosmopolitan resorts she frequented. The word universally applied to her was "interesting." She felt interesting, too—which was why she carried conviction.

"I've often thought," she pursued, in her languid way, "that if we ever did meet I'd tell you something of your influence over Hilda. It's been quite different from any one else's," she went on, before he had time to recover from his surprise. "In fact, I've never known any one else to have an influence over her at all."

"But I've only met Miss Penrhyn a few times," he thought it right to protest, "at long intervals."

"Yes; but when you *have* met—I never saw any one so changed as she was after you and she had been staying with Osborne and Emma—let me see!—where was it?"

"At Winnipeg?"

"Some such place. But I never saw any one so changed—"

"Changed—how?"

"More liberal—more tolerant. She has a beautiful character, Mr. Grace—she really has—but too tenacious in thinking she's right."

"Perhaps she's tenacious in thinking she's right because she *is* right."

"In a measure that's true—but one can push it

too far, don't you think? Hilda never could see any point of view but her own till after—I've often wondered what you could have said to her. I saw she was changed as soon as she rejoined me at Montreal. She was softer, less indifferent. It's been a great grief to me, Mr. Grace—her indifference to every one. We know the nicest people—people who are nice by birth and people who become nice by talent—I'm democratic enough to acknowledge that there are both kinds—but in nine cases out of ten Hilda ignores them. She's considered cold—but she really isn't cold, she's—well, I don't know what she is—but she's not cold. She's intense. She's puzzling, too. But she's not pliable. She doesn't meet people half-way. There have been so many who—if she'd only met them half-way—"

"The pot of gold doesn't meet you half-way. You've got to go to the end of the rainbow and find it."

"There's something in that. You understand so well, Mr. Grace. She really isn't what she seems to be on the surface—she really isn't. I wish you'd talk to her. Talk to her often. I should be so glad if she could carry your influence back to Nice. We sail right after the wedding."

Charlie Grace endeavored to put this injunction into effect as soon as dinner was over. During that meal he had no opportunity for speech with Miss Penrhyn, except when the conversation became general. She displayed animation in talking with the fair young Englishman who was to marry Sophy, and she listened with respect to Osborne's observations on politics and finance, but she betrayed no sign of remembering that she had once spent a week

under the same roof with the tall young man opposite, and that they had engaged in conversations that might have been called intimate. On entering the drawing-room earlier in the evening she had offered him her hand, saying, with casual cordiality: "How do you do? So glad to see you again," and had passed on to Mr. Colet before he, Charlie Grace, was able to say a word that could detain her. He noticed at once, what he had time to observe with more leisure during dinner, that eight years had ripened into beauty the charm he had last seen coming into flower, substituting for young reserve the poise of the woman of the world. She wore the shimmering black which was the fashion of the time, with a large pink rose in the center of her corsage. Thrown into relief by the uniform ivory tint of the bosom, the throat, the complexion, the nut-brown hair, and the nut-brown eyes, the flower was sufficient in itself to produce the effect of unusual richness of coloring.

"Mrs. Penrhyn has given me leave to come and see you when I go to Europe."

On the return to the drawing-room he had slipped into a low chair close to her upright one, though somewhat behind it. Bending forward, with his arm across his knee, he could see her regular, delicate profile at much the same angle as on the occasion when he had first sat beside her. She turned slightly round toward him as she said:

"How delightful! Are you coming soon?"

"I'm coming as soon as I can."

"That sounds as if it mightn't be as soon as we hope."

She fanned herself slowly with a large black

feather fan. She was distinctly experienced and self-possessed, giving the impression of a woman who has talked to a great many men and regarded them with some disdain. He contrasted her with the heroines of his various romances. He saw now that they had been primitive, earthy, dominated by a sense of sex. Love for them was the pearl of great price, for which they had had to pay through all the stages of satiety, revulsion, neglect, brutality, and abandonment. With one or another he had lived through these phases, following them sympathetically through tears and despairs, out to ultimate consolation. This woman seemed to know of no such perils. Her smile shot straight to the soul of masculine arts, exposing their clumsiness and ineffectuality. Her glance removed her to a distance. He received anew the impression that she had lived before—that behind her sad brown eyes were accumulated stores of experience, of other times, of other men, giving her immunity now, and power.

To Charlie Grace the attitude was new and provocative. It spurred his ambition; it roused the doggedness of his instinct not to be beaten; it gave to his intonations the caressing, tempting quality he had learned to used with advantage.

"What a lot of practice it must take," he smiled, rather wistfully, "to perfect the art of putting things."

She lifted her brows inquiringly. "The art of putting things?"

"As you put it just now: 'Not so soon as we hope.' You make it sound as if you really did hope; only that—"

"What makes you think I don't?"

"I was going to tell you—only that in the voice itself there's a subtle something, more expressive than actual words, which shows that you don't care whether I come or not."

"But you wouldn't have me say that—even if it were true. Or, would you?"

"It isn't necessary to say it when you have a voice that betrays you."

"In that case I need be the less careful to choose my words."

"Not when I record them so exactly. I remember nearly everything I've ever heard you say—"

"That wouldn't be putting a great tax on any one's memory, would it?"

"No; I suppose not." He paused, to give his next words more effect. "They were things one wouldn't be likely to forget. Shall I remind you of some of them?"

She spoke with haste. "No, no. It isn't at all necessary."

"I see," he said, significantly. "You remember them, too."

"Even if I don't it's not worth while recalling them. Life wouldn't be bearable if every idle word were to be brought up against one years after it was spoken."

"I should only do it for the sake of making comparisons."

"Comparisons with what?"

"I should like to see—I should like *you* to see—how different you are from what you used to be—more liberal, I imagine"—he tried to recall Mrs. Penrhyn's exact words—"more tolerant—as though some one had brought an influence to bear upon you—"

She laughed, and shook her head. "I don't believe I'm at all interested in that."

He moved slightly forward, so as to look her more directly in the eyes. "Do you remember a conversation we had out on the prairie—"

She pretended to grow pensive. "Let me see! Do I? Weren't there Indians and things—"

"Yes; and a sunset; and a procession of nuns winding along a path through the wheat-fields; and ox-teams creaking. And you said you distrusted me."

She looked at him over her fan. "Did I?"

"Yes; you did. That's one of the points I should like to compare notes about. You said so then, and I think at the time you actually did distrust me—"

"If I said so I did."

"But my point is this, that now you don't distrust me any more."

Still leaning forward, with his arm across his knee, he tilted his long chin with an expression that challenged her. She continued to look at him over her fan. "I should be most unwilling to contradict you," she said, gravely.

"That doesn't commit you to anything."

"Why *should* I be committed to anything?"

"Because responsibility is often not of our own choosing. We can become the guardians of other people's happiness against our wills. When that happens we *are* committed to something, whether we like it or not."

"But you must convince me," she said, inadvertently, "that it has *happened*."

He felt that it was she, now, who challenged him.

He took it as a sign of her willingness to enter into the struggle she had seemed bent on eluding. The discovery caused him an extraordinary emotion.

He lowered his voice to say, "Wouldn't it convince you if I told you that I—"

She sprang up. He saw that his tone had alarmed her. "There's Cousin Emma asking Mr. Colet to sing. Do go and ask him to choose "The Bay of Biscay." It's the one thing he can sing without getting off the key. No; I'll go myself. You may ask him in the wrong way, and hurt his feelings."

The haste with which she had spoken, the unusual precipitancy of her crossing the room, made it plain to him that she had guessed what he was going to say. He was not ill pleased. Though he didn't seriously doubt the fact he had been on the verge of stating, he questioned the wisdom of declaring it there and then. It would have been abrupt, to say the least. She had saved the situation; she had saved *him.* There would be time enough for what he had to tell her after he had taken the opportunity to think it over. Nevertheless, as he watched her talking to young Colet beside the piano he grew the more convinced that his spirit could never rest till it had captured that something in her which held itself aloof, till it had vanquished the principles which were hostile to his own, and brought her into subjection. For this state of mind his vocabulary had but one word; and he was sure that he was right in using it.

CHAPTER II

EXCEPT to himself Charlie Grace did not use that word till the afternoon of Sophy's wedding-day.

Bride and bridegroom had gone, and of the company only a few of the old family friends were still scattered about the fast-emptying drawing-room. Mrs. Hornblower was there, large and imposing in widow's mourning; Fanny was there in autumnal brown, her angularity softened by the wide sleeves which were the mark of the middle nineties; Miss Smedley was there, in voluminous purple, dropping now a boa and now a muff as she shambled from group to group; Mrs. Furnival was there, eternally pleased with the eternal compliment of looking too young to be the mother of the stout, spectacled doctor, fresh from the hospitals of Paris and Vienna, who accompanied her; Reggie Hornblower was there, elegantly condescending, carrying himself with a *blasé* stoop, and showing in the lines of his face the fatigue of a fashionable life.

He greeted Charlie Grace with a tired enthusiasm: "Hel-lo, old Charlie! Gad, it's good to see you. What you been doing this last hundred years?"

Charlie Grace elected to forget that they had not met since the afternoon he had gone to Reggie's rooms at Beck Hall. He elected to forget the circumstance that he had once been among the wrong

people, since the fact that he had been successful and was making money was establishing his place among the right ones. He had everything to gain in letting bygones be bygones, and not standing too much on his dignity. Freddy Furnival joined them, looking German and learned after his years abroad, and all three talked of old times. It was, What's become of this one? and, What's become of that one? till Charlie Grace said suddenly, as he turned accidentally toward Reggie, "What's become of Hattie Bright?"

Reggie's prominent blue eyes blinked, while his weak smile might have been taken as betraying embarrassment. "How should I know? Why the devil do you ask *me?*"

"I wasn't asking you in particular. I was asking either of you. Only, Furny's been away, and I thought you might know."

It was impossible to carry the subject further because Mrs. Furnival fluttered up, taking her son's arm, as though once more to get a foil for her youthfulness, while she lisped to Charlie Grace:

"Such a pretty wedding! I've never seen a lovelier bride go up the aisle of St. Thomas's. And it's delightful to see *you* again, Charlie, after these years and years. I hear you've so much money you can't begin to spend it. Ah, well! I suppose you weren't intended for the Church after all. I'm very fatalistic that way. I consider that when things don't happen they weren't meant to happen. But we used to think you were born to be a clergyman, after you put that wig in the missionary box. They were happy old times, weren't they? I've never felt quite the same since we moved to Seventy-third

Street, and no church can ever be to me like old St. David's. Not that I don't go regularly to St. Thomas's. I do. I consider it isn't the man we go for, or the people, but the Church. I'm very broad-minded that way. Well, I must say good-by. So delightful to see you again, and such a pretty wedding! I've never seen a lovelier bride go up the aisle of St. Thomas's."

The two young men having slipped away, Mrs. Furnival slipped after them, but on taking a step or two she fluttered back.

"Did you ever see anything so exquisite as Hilda Penrhyn?" she whispered, archly. "I can't imagine what the young men are thinking of. Can *you?* Look at her now."

Mrs. Furnival having glided away before Charlie Grace could formulate an answer, he couldn't but look at Hilda, as had been suggested. Not that he needed the suggestion. He had been looking at her all the afternoon. He thought nothing could have been more charming than the ease with which she assisted Emma, moving about among the guests, with a thought for every one's comfort, welcoming and being welcomed. He was not blind to the fact that, except for a few old parishioners of St. David's, what was really distinguished in the little gathering was there because of the Penrhyn connection. He recalled Emma's words of a fortnight earlier: "If Hilda were to marry a man of means she could put him where she liked in New York." If he was not precisely a man of means he was likely to become one. In another ten years, if the development of the Canadian northwest continued, he would be wealthy. He dwelt upon the phrase "She could put

him where she liked in New York." He made it clear to himself that he cared relatively little for social position in itself: what he cared for was New York—his birthplace, his home, his *patria*.

Never had he been so proud to call himself a New-Yorker as now. It was the moment of the great city's expansion into a world metropolis. She exhaled success as a spring glade exhales perfume. Force, inspiration, triumph were the constituents of her atmosphere. One breathed them in. Talk of the energy of the West! It was but the energy of children at play as compared with that of a giant working in a forge. In the West there were half a dozen interests—big interests, it was true—but few. Here there were half a million—weltering, raging, burning together, like passions in a soul. And they were all his! He was born of them. They were bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh, and blood of his blood. They were meant for him, and he for them—not as one to come and go obscurely, picking up crumbs from the rich man's table—they were meant for him, and he for them, as honors are meant for a prince, and as a prince is the heir to the best things in the world.

It was easy for him to watch for the moment when not more than three or four guests were left, and Miss Penrhyn was tired, to insist on her having a cup of tea. He brought it to her in the embrasure of the large bay-window. As she sat on the window-seat he put a little table before her on which he placed sandwiches and cakes. Having thus secured her comfort, he sat down beside her. Curtains half screened them from the few people talking to Osborne and Emma and Mrs. Penrhyn at the other

end of the room. Owing to the curve of the window-seat, they saw each other at the oblique angle most favorable for talk.

"I should think you'd be awfully glad to be back among them all again," he said, by way of a beginning.

"It *is* pleasant," she admitted, sipping her tea.

"How would you like to come home for good?"

"I should like it well enough, but it wouldn't suit mama."

"I thought you'd say that. But suppose you were to marry over here? What would Mrs. Penrhyn do then?"

She smiled. "We should talk about that when the situation arose."

"Well, why not talk about it now?"

"Because the situation hasn't arisen."

"It has—tentatively; because I'm going to raise it."

She looked at him wonderingly, her cup half lifted to her lips. "I don't see how you can."

"Any one can raise a question—for discussion." Then he added, daringly, "I shall do it by asking you to marry *me*."

There was a brief silence. "And when I say I can't," she smiled, "that ends it, doesn't it?"

"No; because you must tell me *why* you can't. *I* think you can."

"I've noticed," she continued to smile, "that you always put the burden of explaining things on me. You always have. If I weren't rather adroit in eluding it—"

"This time you shouldn't elude it. I've always understood that when a man asks a woman to marry

him she's in honor bound to give him a reason for refusing."

She laughed. "I haven't been taught that doctrine. But since you insist, I can give you a very conclusive reason. Only it's such an obvious one that—"

"That it's not worth bringing up. In that case, suppose we leave it alone. I know what it is—it's that you don't care for me. But if I care enough for two—"

She shook her head. "No one ever cares enough for two."

"If you'd let me tell you how much I do care! I —I love you!"

His voice dropped. He couldn't help its taking on the caressing tone to which it always melted in saying just these words. Perhaps it was that that caused her to make the restless movement he saw pass through her frame—a stirring like that produced by a little shock. She steadied herself by reaching forward and taking a small sugared cake, which she only crumbled in her saucer.

"I should be the more sorry to hear you say that," she said, after what seemed like long reflection, "if I believed it quite true. I've no doubt you think it true," she hastened to add, "only it's a subject on which your ideas and mine would be different."

"It's a subject on which every one's ideas are different from every one else's. And yet love is love—"

"Love is love; but in your love I fancy there would always be something lacking."

He looked at her inquiringly. "Why in my love in particular?"

"Because it's lacking in you." She paused for a

minute, as if to collect strength. Then she added, "Do you want me to tell you what it is?"

He nodded. "Please."

"It's—constancy."

He leaned forward with a start of surprise at her accuracy of insight. "What makes you say that?"

"Because it characterizes everything about you. Constancy always implies some one else to whom to be constant; and you've made up your mind that you'll sacrifice every one to—to whatever you happen to want to do. You'd sacrifice Cousin Osborne if he came in your way. Wouldn't you? Tell me," she went on, with a heightening of animation; "suppose a situation were to arise in which his interests and yours were in conflict. What would you do? Would you let a sense of obligation to him—or a sense of anything—weigh with you to give him the preference?"

"Let us assume that I wouldn't. Osborne wouldn't expect me to."

"That's begging the question. I'm asking what you'd be prompted to yourself."

"I might be prompted to one thing, and yet actually do another."

She put down her cup, and sat with hands folded. "That's just it. Your instincts would be to be loyal; but your theory of life—"

"My theory of life," he broke in, quickly, "would be not to try to live by a code which the rest of the world has abandoned. That's too one-sided to be fair. It's all very well for a woman who hasn't got to get down in the ditch and fight to live in a palace of dreams. But a man can't—not if he wants to be successful."

"It depends on what he means by success. Just now," she added, "I must go and say good-by to Miss Smedley."

She left him, but he continued to sit where he was. Looking meditatively at the floor, he tried to appraise the situation. Of one thing he felt sure—nothing she had said as yet was final. She might be his old self risen again; but, if so, she spoke with a voice in which he detected—or thought he detected—a craving to be stifled.

He took it as in his favor that when Miss Smedley had gone Hilda came back and sat where she had been sitting before. There was no reason, he argued, for her return, unless she was willing to go on with the subject.

"It depends on what he means by success," she repeated, taking up the argument where she had dropped it.

He was determined to be outspoken. "What *I* mean by it," he declared, "is what the majority of Americans mean by it—material success—in other words, success in making money. For us any other meaning to the word is exceptional—and rather strained. As I understand it, material success is the one point in which we lead the world. Our supremacy in anything else can be challenged—but not in that. You can hardly blame me for being typical of my own countrymen, can you?"

"I don't presume to blame you; I'm only pointing out. You ask me for a reason for not marrying you, and I give you one. I don't say it's the only reason; but since it's sufficient—"

"I don't think it *is* sufficient. It wouldn't stand for a minute if you really cared for me."

She colored slightly. "As to that I must leave you to make your own deductions."

He grew still more daring. "That's just what I'm doing; and the first deduction I make is that you do care for me—a little."

"I should be sorry to enter into a discussion on that point," she said, with one of her slow dreamy smiles; "but I'm willing to say this much—that even if I cared more for you than I do I shouldn't marry you. I should be afraid of you. I should be afraid that if I ever became burdensome to you—or if you ceased to—to—to have the same feeling for me—or if you came to care for any one else—"

"But you wouldn't expect me to do that?"

"That's exactly what I should expect—and if it happened you'd want to sweep me out of your way as you've swept others—and I shouldn't yield to you. That's where the trouble would lie. It wouldn't be altogether with you. It would be largely with me. If I were meeker or more submissive it might be different. But I'm not submissive—I'm not meek—I don't easily bend to other people's wishes or take their opinions—and so I've made up my mind—or practically made up my mind—that I'm the kind of woman who'd better not marry at all."

"If that's the only thing—" he began, with a laugh.

"But it's not the only thing," she declared, rising, and standing before him. "It's far from the only thing—"

As he got to his feet he showed some of the signs of exasperation habitual with a man to whom opposition is rare. "And whatever the other things

are, they all merge into this—that you—distrust me. I'd begun to hope that you'd got over that. I've tried to make you say it. But I see now—"

She turned away from him, gazing across the room, which but for themselves was empty. "I can't help—perhaps I oughtn't to say it—you're offended already, and you may be more so—but I can't help distrusting a man who's done what you've done—given up high aims in life for lower ones. I can't help it."

He let that pass. "But, even so, there's a difference between distrust and—dislike," he insisted.

"I admit the difference—and yet for my purpose they come to the same thing."

"That is, that you won't marry me."

"That I can't."

"Does that distinction mean that you would if you could?"

She looked at him with another dim, slow smile. "I think I've said all there is to say for the moment. I must bid you good-by. I'm very tired. Cousin Emma may want me, too."

She held out her hand, which he took and retained. His tone softened. "How long do you think I've loved you?"

She tried to withdraw her hand, but, finding this impossible without a struggle, let it remain in his. "Please don't ask me such questions as that."

"I've loved you since the first moment I ever saw you. That was twelve years ago—at a performance of 'Carmen.' Do you remember? It was in the afternoon—"

"No; I don't remember—or rather I think I do. Please let me go."

"I've loved you ever since then. I shall let you go when I've told you the rest of what I have to say. I've loved you ever since then—and I shall go on loving you." He grew dominating, combative. "I shall go on, because I see that you'll come to it, too. You may go back to Nice—but you'll think of me when you're gone. When some one else asks you to marry him you'll think of me—and you'll say 'No' to him. Lots of men must have asked you to marry them during the last eight years—"

She tried to disclaim this imputation of conquest. "Only two—or three, perhaps. Do let me go. Please."

"And when they did you thought of that day on the prairie—when we talked together—and you—"

"No, no. You're quite wrong. That had nothing to do with my decision—nothing. I couldn't—well, partly for the same reason that I can't now. I didn't wholly respect them—any of them—and I can't wholly respect you."

"Oh, but you will."

"If I do I may change my mind"—she tried to laugh, nervously, freeing her hand at last—"but not before."

"That will be soon enough. You may go now," he added, with a gesture. "if you insist on it—but I hope you'll remember that this is the beginning —not the end."

CHAPTER III

AND yet for more than a year and a half it *was* the end. Hilda Penrhyn went back with her mother to Nice, and Charlie Grace returned to his work in the Canadian northwest. There were still a few days before the separation during which they continued to meet, but he made no effort to repeat what he had said already. Once or twice, it seemed to him, she left the opportunity open; but he preferred for the present to let the matter rest where it was. A more determined refusal might make it impossible for him to begin again, when perhaps the chances would be more in his favor.

He hoped at first that he should be able to make his visit to Europe in the early part of the following year; but it was the early part of the next year—1899—before he managed it. During the intervening months he had seen several changes, each in the nature of an advance. He had been moved, for brief periods, from Forde to Winnipeg, from Winnipeg to Montreal, from Montreal to Queen Charlotte, and from Queen Charlotte to Quebec. From the financial point of view his position on the Trans-Canadian was becoming secondary to his other interests, though his other interests were best served by his connection with the great railway system that was so remarkably fulfilling the dreams of its promoters and helping to create a new empire. In the end it

was a mission on which Osborne Tomlinson sent him to London that brought him within reach of Nice.

It was a shock to him to find the woman round whom his dreams had so long centered living in restricted quarters in a hotel of the second or third order. Not till he entered its modest door did the realization ever come home to him that Mrs. Penrhyn was actually poor, with a genuine, undecorative poverty. He had always fancied "living abroad," "spending the winter on the Riviera," to be essentially conditions of gaiety and elegance. In his own expensive hotel on the Promenade des Anglais there was everything to bear out this impression; but, while he expected to find his friends less showily installed, he was not prepared for the extreme simplicity of their surroundings. As in a little *voiture de place* he drove back from the Promenade with its glittering sea, its leisured crowds, and its air of extravagant cosmopolitan expenditure, through mean and narrow streets, to stop at last before a long white, barracklike hotel, noticeably unpretentious, he thought at first that he had made a mistake in the address. A spacious garden, stately with palms and gay with geraniums and mimosa, offered some consolation to the eye, but this pleasing impression was dispelled on entering the hall, with its carpet of matting, its worn wicker tables and chairs, and its odor of stale cigarettes.

All at once Charlie Grace felt himself swept by a wave of indignation that the woman whom his fancy saw as almost too exquisite for earth should be forced to take refuge in this second-rate *milieu*. His protective instincts were stirred as they had not

been since his father died. Springs of tenderness were suddenly opened up that had been sealed since the day his mother was laid to rest at Horsehair Hill. For the first time he thought of Hilda Penrhyn as needing him as much as he needed her. The idea was curiously new to him. It was part of the egoism fostered by his manner of life during the past nine or ten years that in desiring her his object had been first of all to get something for himself. She was worth possession. She was an object to be won with the patience and struggle that had gone into his winning of other things on which his heart was set. While he knew she would be of help to his life, it had scarcely occurred to him that he could be of help to hers. Now that he perceived it, he was thrilled with a joyous sense of power. If he expected much from her, he could give her much in return. He could take her out of this lowly setting and put her where she would shine. He could spend money on her; he could dower her with the privilege of spending money on herself. He could restore her eventually to the soil to which she was indigenous, where she would be conspicuous, brilliant, dashing. He, too, would be conspicuous, brilliant, dashing, burning, as a husband should in social matters, in his wife's reflected light.

On being shown up-stairs he found Mrs. Penrhyn's sitting-room empty. It was a small room, narrow for its length, but more tastefully furnished than the rest of the hotel had led him to expect. There were flowers, books, and magazines. On an upright piano the score of an opera lay open. What specially caught his eye were the signed photographs that stood wherever there was room for them—ladies in

court dress, officers in uniform, as well as faces familiar to him through the illustrated papers, or from visits to the theater and the opera. He had a renewal of that satisfaction in knowing people who knew the great of which he was ashamed. One side of his mind took pleasure in the thought that he, too, might some day come to know the great even while the other treated the ambition with disdain.

Presently Mrs. Penrhyn entered from the adjoining room alone. He noticed at once that her languid grace was more languid than it had been eighteen months before. Her mournful eyes were more pathetically mournful. She was paler, too—so pale as to seem waxlike, diaphanous. It was apparently an effort for her to hold out her hand, to speak, or to smile. He thought she did all three with the gasp of relief that welcomes rescue. The high comedy of dethronement had apparently been played to the end, giving place to a worn, pitiful reality.

"Hilda isn't at home," she explained, when they were seated beside a small fire of gnarled, semi-combustible olive logs. She spoke with difficulty—a catch in her breath. "Yes; she knew you were coming, but she had an engagement at the English Church. She does a great deal of work there. Canon Langhorne thinks her invaluable. I like her to do it, because it's an interest for her; and life as we live it here lacks interests."

"But I thought that's just what it didn't. I thought it was all so gay—and picturesque—and romantic—"

She smiled wearily. "It would be for you—for a season or two. But you'd grow tired of it. It's

like always seeing the same play. It palls on you in the end, however beautiful the setting or perfect the acting. I don't mind for myself so much. I do mind for Hilda. I used to hope—for something quite different for her."

He resolved to speak plainly while he had the chance. "She could have something quite different now. I'd give it to her—if she'd take it."

She pressed her handkerchief to her lips. "I can't help wishing she would."

"Well, wouldn't she?"

She evaded the question. "You see, if I were taken she'd be so desperately alone—and—and part of my income is only a life interest—so there'd be that, too—and—and other things. I can't help telling you, Mr. Grace—because—well, because you do seem nearer to us than any one else—through Osborne and Emma—especially over here—where every one is nice—only strangers—"

The broken appeal touched him. It was as much for the sake of Mrs. Penrhyn and her daughter as for his own that he said, earnestly:

"Don't you think she would now? I asked her before—perhaps you didn't know it—"

"I guessed it."

"And she wouldn't. But I've given her all this time to think it over. If in the mean while she had preferred any one else she'd have been free to take him; but since she hasn't done that—"

"I'll tell you candidly—I can't make her out, Mr. Grace. And yet I should say that if there was *any one*, it might be you."

He felt himself coloring while he said, "Do you mean that she ever speaks of me?"

"Not often; but when she does—" She paused, listening. "I think I hear her now. She's talking to some one in the hall. She said she'd be back for tea—and that I was to keep you."

Three weeks passed, however, before Charlie Grace ventured to renew the subject that lay silently between Hilda Penrhyn and himself. He was not without a motive in holding back, thinking it wise that she should grow used to his presence, used to his usefulness, before he risked anything further. He waited, therefore, till the evening before the date he had fixed tentatively as that of his departure for Italy. If she accepted him he would postpone his going, or would go and come back. If she persisted in refusing him the journey to Italy would be an excuse for taking himself away.

He had dined with Mrs. and Miss Penrhyn in the restaurant of their hotel, coming out for the demi-tasse to a terrace overlooking the garden. Fearing the night air, Mrs. Penrhyn had gone to her room. It seemed to him there was an element of daring in the way in which Hilda led him to a table at the end of the terrace, remote from any of the groups that had preceded them from the restaurant. Possibly, he reflected, she foresaw what was coming, and was eager to get it over. As to that, however, he could only guess, since she was proof against self-betrayal. Not once during his stay in Nice had she seemed to remember that he had already asked her to marry him, and would probably do so again.

The night was balmy and faintly scented with flowers. Over the flat roofs of the neighboring houses a full golden moon was coming up, throw-

ing palms and mimosas into relief against patches of white wall and deepening the shadows at the bottom of the garden. From a near-by hotel came the tinkling of mandolins, with the voices of strolling Neapolitan singers. It was natural that the conversation should turn, as it had turned already, on the journey he was to begin next day.

"So, after you've done Italy," she said, in the effort to make dialogue, "you'll go on to England by way of Vienna and Munich. Is that it?"

"That's it," he replied, with seeming tranquillity; "unless I come back here."

She picked up the scarf she had brought out with her and threw it over her shoulders. "Wouldn't it be a pity to do that, now that you know this coast so well?"

"I shouldn't do it for the coast. It would only be in case you—you needed me."

Having thrown this bomb into her camp, he puffed quietly at his cigar.

"You're very kind," she managed to say, after brief hesitation; "but I don't think there's any likelihood of that."

"I do," he said, calmly. "I think you need me now. You're forlorn. You're lonely."

She put her half-empty coffee-cup on the little iron table painted green that stood between them. "I had no idea you were such a psychologist."

"You have no idea of a good many things I can be till you've tried me."

"Oh, but I *have* tried you in some things—"

"And found me wanting," he said, quickly, with suspicion. "Is that what you were going to say?"

"I wasn't going to *say* it; but since you've done that—"

"You'll admit that it's true."

"I'll admit that it's true," she said, slowly, "in certain things—that seem to me vital."

He threw himself back in his seat rather wearily. "So that we come back to the same old story. We're still there."

"That depends on you. We're still there—if you are."

"That is, if I haven't repented and changed. Well, I haven't."

She shook her head. "I've not asked you anything about that."

"No; but I wish you would. We should be playing then with the cards on the table."

"Oh, but I didn't know we were playing at all."

"*I* am," he asserted, with emphasis.

"But it takes two to make a game—unless you enjoy solitaire."

He looked hurt. "Surely this is no more than fencing with words—"

"There's no harm in that, is there? One fences to protect oneself—"

"From danger; yes. But I'm offering you safety. I wish you could believe in me."

"I do believe in you—up to a point."

"Up to what point?"

"That's not easy to say. It isn't necessary, either. The fact that there's a point at all is the only thing of importance."

He brushed this argument away. "That's not important. There's always a point—to every one's belief in every one. No one has absolute belief in

any one else. That's because we're human. There's even a point to my belief in you. Do you want to know where I put it?"

She laughed. "I don't think I do."

He leaned forward again, his arms crossed on the table, the cigar smoking between his fingers. "I think I'll tell you, just the same. I know you're good—very good—almost too good; and yet, like many good people, you lack charity in your judgment of others."

She weighed this for some time in silence. "That's probably true," she admitted. "But there's this difference between my shortcomings and yours. When I have to recognize a fault in myself I'm sorry for it, and I try to correct it—I really do. Whereas you glory in yours with a kind of cynicism. Having started out to win, by fair means or foul, you're proud of having done it."

"Not proud," he corrected. "I'm only satisfied to have fulfilled to some extent what the world has required of me. I didn't set the test, and so I'm not responsible for it. My part has been limited to meeting it."

"To meeting it—by fair means or foul."

"There are no foul means nowadays. Everything has become like love and war—all's fair. I don't see why you should expect me to live by standards no one else is conforming to."

"As far as I have a right to expect anything of you at all I limit myself to being sorry you're not true to yourself. You were meant for such high things—"

He broke in with an impatient gesture. "That's only the legend that has come down to you from

my childhood. You've heard it from Emma—or some one else. I get awfully sick of it, even though it began with the dreams of my mother. She was a saint—the only saint I've ever known, except you—and you're different. She wanted me to go into the Church, as it's called—but she didn't know me as I really am. Let me tell you once for all that there never was a time when money and the instinct for making it weren't the first things in my thoughts. As far as my memory goes back I can see myself fighting against the fact of being poor. When I decided to strike out into the world for myself—and make money if I could—I didn't fall away from any imaginary call to higher things. I assure you I didn't. I gave up the unreal for the real; and if ever I was true to myself, as you put it, it was then."

He drew two or three puffs from his cigar, waiting for her to say something. Seeing her brown eyes rest on him in distant silent wonder, he went on energetically.

"I wanted to be respected; I wanted to be free. No poor man is ever respected. The saint and the sinner despise him alike. The Christian and the heathen despise him. The priest and the bishop despise him. You despise him yourself. No, no; you needn't protest. You despised *me*—till I did the things you disapprove of and made money. As a matter of fact, you'd never have admitted me to the equality with yourself I'm enjoying at this minute if I hadn't done it. Would you, now? You may condemn me on some fine-spun theory, but in your heart of hearts you respect me as you would never have respected me if I'd been a poor devil of a

clergyman, living on a pittance, and knocked about from pillar to post. A poor man is not a free man. The rich—and those who, like yourself, belong to the side of the rich—make him either a rebel or a reptile. I've no taste for being either—and yet you blame me."

For a few minutes she kept silence, sitting with face partly averted from him, in order not to look into his eyes.

"There *is* some truth in what you say," she began, at last, "even as concerns me; but—"

"Then why not take me as I am?" he begged, vehemently. "I love you. I've loved you all these years. I've waited for you—"

"You mustn't make me responsible for that," she said, hurriedly.

"I don't make you responsible for anything. I want to take every possible burden on myself. I'm equal to it, too—and the more equal to it because I've never cared for any woman as I care for you."

She raised her head, quickly. "But you *have* cared for other women?"

"Not like this. It wasn't the same thing. It was nothing but—"

"I don't want to know what it was. But you *did* care—and you went on and cared again—for some one else." She rose quietly. "Come down into the garden. We can talk there more easily."

When they had descended the steps from the terrace she surprised him by taking his arm. They followed a graveled path leading into the comparative obscurity of the palms and mimosas.

"You must understand," she said, at once, "that your having cared for other women has only this to

do with me, that what has happened already may happen again—would probably happen again. You tell me you've—you've—thought of me for years, and yet that didn't keep you from—"

"You weren't there," he objected, hotly. "You were thousands of miles away. I didn't know I should ever see you again. I was lonely—in lonely places—and young—"

"Please don't explain. I'm only taking what you say as an illustration of the future from the past. What's happened once—more than once—would be all the more likely to recur because—because I'm older than you."

He pressed the hand on his arm close to his side as he said, impatiently, "In everything that's essential I'm much older than you."

"You may feel so now. But ten years hence—when you'll still be a young man—and I'm growing to be a middle-aged woman—"

"There's nothing in that argument," he declared, scornfully. "It's been refuted by happy marriages over and over again. You've some other objection in the back of your mind, and you're not telling me frankly. Is it that you don't want to go and live in the northwest? Because if you don't—"

"No; it isn't that. Except for mama, I shouldn't care where I lived."

"If you do object to the northwest I may as well tell you now that I shall be able to take up work in New York in a year or two. I've got Ellis out of the running. He's done for. They're holding the place for me—as soon as old Purvis consents to take a back seat. But in any case I'd rather have another two years in the west for the sake of my own

affairs. Then I shall be in a position to give you all the things you ought to have—a big house, a carriage, jewelry, an opera-box—"

"Oh, please! I don't want any of those things. My tastes don't lie that way."

"Nonsense! Every woman's tastes lie that way. I want to give you all the things you've had to give up—the things that belong to you. You'll be the most talked-of woman in New York. There'll be nothing you can't have. And if you want to take Mrs. Penrhyn to Florida for the winters—why, it will be just as you say."

They reached a balustrade at the end of the garden, separating the grounds of their own hotel from those of the next. She released his arm, drawing her scarf more closely about her, and throwing one end of it over her left shoulder. There was just light enough to make the sequins on the gauze gleam faintly. Charlie Grace half leaned, half sat, on the low balustrade so that, as Hilda stood facing him, her eyes were on a level with his.

"You don't have to tell me all those things," she said, after long thinking, "to show me how kind you'd be. I know you'd be kind. That's not what I'm afraid of."

"Then what *are* you afraid of?" he asked, gently.

"I should be afraid of—the whole thing."

"I see. The same old doubt."

She nodded.

His voice became caressing, reproachful. "Which means that you don't love me."

"It doesn't mean that so much as—"

He leaned forward suddenly and caught her hand.

"It doesn't mean that? Then what does it mean? You do love me then?—a little?"

She withdrew her hand. "But not enough for what you want. I'll be frank with you. I admire you—I can't tell you how much I admire you. And it's quite true what you said just now—that I admire you for doing the very things I disapprove of. I don't understand myself in that respect. I'm inconsistent—but I'm telling you the truth. And because it *is* the truth I must ask you to believe me when I say that what I feel for you isn't enough—"

He seized both her hands in both of his in an effort to draw her down to him. "It's enough if I think it is. I'm not asking for more than you can give. I should be content with anything you felt able to offer me."

"But I shouldn't, you see. When a woman—I mean a woman like me—is willing to take all, she wants to give all—and I could only give with hesitations and reserves."

He dropped her hands as suddenly as he had taken them, springing up from his place on the wall. The probing instrument that had hitherto been only hurting him had touched him on the quick.

"With hesitations and reserves and suspicions," he said, coldly. "You might have saved yourself that repetition."

She clasped her hands, looking up at him mutely for a second or two, and then, with a little cry, "Oh, Charlie, don't be angry with me."

"I'm not angry," he declared, starting to walk back toward the hotel. "I'm only tired—frightfully tired—of it all. Distrust of me has become a sort of *idée fixé* with you, hasn't it? It's no use

my trying to dispel it. Not that I mean to make the attempt. As I am I am. If I fail to gain your good opinion I've no doubt it's as much my fault as my misfortune; but I've neither the time nor the inclination to make myself over."

The change in him was so sudden that it frightened her. "You don't know how sorry I am," she faltered, trying to keep pace with his rapid, impetuous steps —"you don't know how sorry I am for anything I've said that has wounded you. I shouldn't have done it if I hadn't felt it my duty to make the situation clear."

"Oh, you've made it clear enough—needlessly clear. But isn't it a part of rhetoric, when you've sufficiently scored your point to leave it alone?"

"I should have been only too glad to leave it alone, Charlie—"

"And please don't call me Charlie," he said, irritably. "Only my very best friends do that."

She ignored his peevishness. "I hoped you would have included me among their number."

"I hoped so, too, till you've put the ban on it yourself. You can't have friendship where there's a persistent lack of confidence."

"Not generally," she admitted; "but I thought this case might be exceptional."

He gave a short laugh. "You don't scruple to return to the charge, do you?"

"I don't scruple to do anything that will be for your good," she said, as they emerged from the friendly shadow of the palms into the light streaming from the hotel. "I hope you'll do me the justice to remember that whatever I've said to-night has been more for your sake than for my own. If I'd been thinking only of myself—"

"Oh, of course," he jerked out, laconically.

At the foot of the steps leading up to the terrace he paused. "I don't think I need go in," he said, still in a tone of offense. "It's too late to disturb Mrs. Penrhyn. Perhaps you'll say good-by to her for me."

She nodded, trying to escape from him with some conventional form of farewell; but he began again:

"Do you remember that the last time we—we went over this ground—the day Sophy was married—I said it was not the end, but the beginning?"

She nodded again. "I think I do," she answered, faintly.

"Well, I don't say that to-night. To-night—as far as I'm concerned—it's the *end*."

"I'm sure that's best," she managed to say.

"I'm going in the morning—and I shall go for good. I shall never come back—never—unless—unless you call me."

"You mustn't hope for that," he heard her whisper, as he lifted his hat and turned away.

Charlie Grace left next day for Genoa. He lingered there, and also at Turin, Milan, Bologna, and Pisa. It was nearly a fortnight later that he arrived in Florence, where a telegram awaited him. It had been sent by way of his London bankers, and was dated three days earlier.

Mama died in her sleep last night. Can you come to me?
HILDA PENRHYN.

CHAPTER IV

"SO she's called me back!"

The thought was in Charlie Grace's mind before he had read to the end of the telegram. Everything else was secondary to it—even her bereavement. She had called him back! He should see her, talk with her, reason with her, plead with her—renewing the struggle which in a moment of exasperation he had rashly given up.

He had been cursing that rashness during the whole fortnight of his sauntering through northern Italy. In long days of heavy-hearted sight-seeing he had had time to think over some of her broken utterances, some of her half-admissions, and to extract their significance. It brought him to a perception of things that had escaped him in the hour in the garden at Nice. He came to believe that in the very act of protesting against him with the conscience she loved him with the heart—while he had been so dull as to hear only the protest. He could afford to smile at that if she loved him. He could even approve of it—in a woman. It was necessary, he argued, that in business, as in some other things, there should be one law for the woman and another for the man. He would not have liked it if she had been able to take his cynical, disillusioned point of view. How could she smile indulgence on a life like his? He could be tolerant of

it himself on the ground that he lived according to the standards of other men; but he knew the angels must regard it from a different angle—and so must she. There were women who didn't—who couldn't—so regard it, who accepted him as good enough as he was; and after brief, stormy intimacies he had turned from each one of them with aversion. To be loved by a woman to whom his soul was dearer than his body would be something like redemption—a redemption in which he should get a kind of vicarious justification, while still doing as he pleased.

Appreciation of her loss came to him when he was shown into the long narrow sitting-room late on the following afternoon. In spite of the fact that there was no change in its arrangements, and more flowers than usual, it seemed curiously empty. She herself looked small and lonely as she rose from a chair by a window. Her pallor was perhaps intensified by the dimness of twilight and the severity of her black dress; but he could see she had been crying.

What happened after that always defied his capacity to analyze. Between the moment of his entering the room and that when he found her in his arms there was a space of suspended mental action such as comes during a vivid flash of lightning. He could remember neither her crossing the floor nor his opening his arms to receive her. He only knew that she was sobbing with her head against his breast and that he was kissing the coils of her brown hair.

How long they stood so together was not to be reckoned in terms of time. He could recall that somehow she released herself, and that they sat

down with the width of the room between them. Of the two he was the more embarrassed. His heart was pounding, his blood was surging, his cheeks were hot. He could hardly listen while she talked. She had returned to her seat by the window, where her back was toward the fading light. Considering what had just occurred, it seemed to him she spoke with an amazing lack of constraint. If anything, there was in her voice a note of relief.

She was telling him what had happened—how well her mother had been the night before she died, how she had read, and played the piano a little, and quite late, after Hilda herself had gone to bed, had pared an apple and brought it into Hilda's room. They had eaten it together, the mother sitting by the bedside, chatting of the events of the day. She went on to relate those simple happenings which grief finds sacred—those last stirrings of a life's activities which become significant because they *are* the last. She had wakened twice, once to hear her mother coughing, and once to notice she was restless. The second time she had got up and gone to her mother's room to find her dropping off into a doze. That must have been about three o'clock. About six—a little before daylight—she got up again. Her mother was asleep. She was still asleep at eight o'clock, at nine, at ten. At ten the daughter, a little alarmed, had noticed more particularly, and found her dead. The doctor said she must have died between four and five.

He saw it was a comfort to her to talk to him, and let her do so. His attention became active only with the words:

"I wired to you at once, though I knew I couldn't

reach you directly. I'm sorry now I did, because I've disturbed you unnecessarily. Canon Langhorne has arranged everything for me. He's been so kind."

He passed over the reference to himself. "What *has* been arranged?"

"She's to be laid beside my father at Tarrytown. We sail from Cherbourg on Wednesday next on the *Prinz August Wilhelm*. Canon Langhorne has found some one to go with me. She came over as companion to a lady who isn't going back, and now she wants to return."

"And when you get to New York what shall you do?"

"I've cabled to the Merediths, asking them to take me in. They've replied at once that I'm to come to them. That will give me time to—to think."

For a minute there was silence. In reply to what apparently she took as a questioning look of his about the room she said: "She's lying in the chapel of the English Church. I like to think of her there."

There seemed little more to say. He, too, wanted to think. As soon as he could do so without seeming abrupt he rose.

"I shall look in again this evening, if I may," he explained. "Just now I should like to go to the steamer office before it closes. I must cable to Osborne, too, so that he'll expect us."

"Oh, but you're not coming with me!" she said, weakly. "I couldn't allow you to interrupt your trip."

It was not difficult for him to silence this protest. "I shouldn't think of your taking the journey alone.

Osborne and Emma would never forgive me." It was on his tongue to add, "If there were no other reason," but he suppressed that. He suppressed even the longing to go forward and take her hand. Contenting himself with a bow from the other side of the room, he went away.

He contented himself with the same attitude of distant respect all through the pilgrimage from Nice to Tarrytown. For the time being it was enough for him to take care of her. It was his first opportunity of taking care of any one. His father had died just as he was becoming able to do it; his brother Edward, a victim of indolence and drink, asked for no more than an occasional check; Emma required nothing from him at all. It was a new luxury, an enlargement of life, to feel some one dependent on him. At each stage in the awesome journey he got pleasure from the thought that Hilda Penrhyn knew he was there, not only looking to her comfort, but seeing that everything else was done decently. While keeping himself unobtrusive, he let her perceive that he stood between her and all the trying details incidental to a journey of the kind.

Two days after the return from Tarrytown she wrote him a note asking him to come and see her. He had made up his mind not to force himself on her unless she summoned him. He would take no advantage of the fact that for a minute or two at Nice she had broken down. He found her alone in a threadbare, old-fashioned drawing-room. Studying her as she sat buried in the corner of a huge mahogany sofa, he discovered a new illumination in her eyes. They made him think of the windows of a

house he had seen only by daylight when they have been lit up at night.

He noticed that she began at once on the subject for which she had sent for him, probably lest he should think she had an ulterior purpose in view.

"I know you've spent a lot of money for me. I wish you'd tell me how much it is."

He considered a moment. "Is that necessary?"

"Don't you see it is? I must pay it back."

He considered again, looking not at her but at a point on the wall beyond her. "I see that it might be necessary," he said, slowly, "if we're not going to be any more to each other than we've been."

He still didn't look at her. He knew without lifting his eyes that she was watching him contemplatively, her cheek resting lightly against her hand, her elbow supported by the arm of the sofa. "Do you think we can?" she asked, at last.

"Do you?"

One could hear the ticking of the mantelpiece clock for some seconds before she said, "I wish I knew."

He took the line of keeping rigidly on his dignity. "I fear I can't help you in that. I've said all I can."

She surprised him by being of his opinion. "No; you can't help me in that. No one can help me. Because, you see, I'm not only afraid of you, but I'm afraid of myself. That's something I haven't confessed to you yet. If I weren't afraid of myself I should be less uncertain about you."

"I don't think I catch your point."

"No; probably not. You couldn't, without knowing me better than you do."

"But I feel I know you so well."

Her dreamy smile seemed to reach him like the light of a star that comes from a long way off. "You never know a person who's as reserved as I am. Even dear mama didn't know me. I used to see her yearning to understand me—but I never gave her any help. I didn't know how, for one thing; and then, children are often cruel in that way to their parents. I always presented a sort of frozen front to mama—as to most people. Some one says there are characters that seem to be made of ice—but ice beyond which there's fire—and that they're always the most dangerous."

It was his turn to smile. "I shouldn't think you were dangerous."

"That's just why I feel it right to warn you."

"On the ground that forewarned is forearmed?"

Her voice, already low, dropped lower, as she said, "No; on the principle that it may be best to leave well enough alone."

"And what about the fact that we're in love with each other?"

He expected her to resent this, but she only said, "That's the most dangerous part of all."

He got up restlessly, leaning at first on the back of the arm-chair from which he had risen. "I confess I don't follow you."

"That's because you don't know me. And the worst of it is that I can't explain. If I could, you wouldn't believe me, because I should be speaking not from facts, but from that kind of intuition which is almost second sight. I'm one of the women of whom it can be said, as Carmen sings, '*Si je t'aime, prends garde à toi!*' I know I don't look the

part, but that's the very reason why I'm telling you."

He laughed. "It's no use your telling me, because I don't believe it. You're too good to be—"

"Oh, I know I'm good; but a good woman can make a man's life as hard as a bad one, if her character isn't suited to his. I can imagine a type of man whom I *might* make happy—"

"Because you'd care for him more," he declared, jealously, beginning to pace up and down the room.

Her voice dropped again. "Perhaps because I'd care for him less."

He wheeled suddenly, coming toward her. "Does that mean—"

She put up a hand as if to keep him away. "I'm speaking of what might be rather than what is."

"And it might be that you'd come to care for me more than—"

"It might be that you'd make me. That's why I'm advising you—I *think* I'm advising you—not to try."

He took a turn up and down the length of the room before saying: "A little while ago the trouble lay with me. Now you've shifted your ground—"

"Because it lies with both of us. That's what makes it so serious. I see so many reasons why you should marry another kind of woman—and why I shouldn't marry at all."

He came near to the end of the sofa, along which her arm lay lightly extended. The emotion or excitement she was determined to suppress betrayed itself in the nervous tapping of her fingers, as well as in the proud erectness of her head. She neither

moved nor looked at him as he approached, but a spot of color came into her cheeks, where color was rare.

Standing above her, bending slightly over her, his twitching hands clasped tightly behind his back, Charlie Grace felt a violent renewal of the impulse always present in him, even when dormant, to subdue her spirit, to break her will. The women he had loved hitherto had been full-blown types, ready to yield. This was a strange little creature, showing fight. If she had had no other attraction for him he must have loved her for being so game. He would have seized her now in his arms and crushed her with an overwhelming tenderness if there had not been about her that spiritual aura which awed him into conventionality.

"And if you didn't marry," he asked, trying hard to keep to a conversational tone, "what should you do?"

She lifted her eyes briefly, letting them drop again. "I don't know," she said, just audibly.

"Should you have money enough to live on?"

"I don't know."

"And if you hadn't, where should you go?"

"I don't know," she repeated. "I haven't thought out any of those things yet."

He dropped on one knee, so as to be on a level with her—the arm of the sofa between them. "You haven't thought them out," he whispered, his face close to hers, "because you've known it wouldn't be necessary. Isn't that it?"

The hand lying lightly on the arm of the sofa continued its tremulous tapping. "Everything is so strange to me," she began, brokenly, "and I'm

so lonely without dear mama—that I haven't been able—"

He bent and kissed her wrist. She surprised him by bursting into tears. He drew her to him, even as he knelt.

"Oh, I wish you wouldn't be so kind," she sobbed as she allowed him to press her head down on his shoulder. "I wish—I wish—you wouldn't be so kind. If I married you—I—I shouldn't think it right."

CHAPTER V

ONE afternoon a few days later Charlie Grace went down to Vandiver Place for the first time since the July morning, nearly ten years earlier, when he had turned his back on it for good. He never thought of it now without the vision of his father, wearing slippers and a long black alpaca house-coat, plodding from room to room, nominally collecting his books, but really tearing his heart-strings from the places and objects round which they had clung for the best part of a lifetime. His impression on turning the corner was that of seeing old familiar things distorted in a dream. The change in sky-line struck him first. Some of the houses had apparently sprouted, and shot up like weeds in an untended garden. Others crouched low, as if shrinking out of sight. The brown-stone fronts, with their high steps and Renaissance porticos, had an apologetic air, as timid obstacles to the march of progress. The row of gray-stone dwellings with the colonnaded front looked like some battered, grim survival of an ancient time. Amiens Cathedral, its spires dwarfed by an adjoining business block with pointed windows considerately designed to harmonize with the church, seemed to wear on its façade the wrinkled frown of a sad old man. Miss Smedley's house, which he understood she still occupied, neat, furbished, with curtains at

the windows, alone flew the flag of defiance of Time.

Picking his way past an establishment for ready-made clothing, its windows attractively filled with genteel, headless men—past a wholesale emporium for millinery, where dark-eyed, oily-skinned girls of Slavic origin were slipping in and out—between packing-cases—and across the tail-ends of drays backed up to the edge of the pavement—Charlie Grace came to the door of St. David's. It was open, and he went in. In the fading light of the winter afternoon the stained-glass windows gleamed with the ghostly radiance of old jewels. Near the chancel one or two jets of gas were burning. From his recollection of former customs he guessed there was going to be a service at five o'clock.

Presently a gray head rose from the bottom of a pew, where it had apparently been intent on some task of mending or adjustment. Charlie Grace went forward.

"Hello, Remnant!" he said, softly.

A little old man in a beadle's gown turned round slowly to salute the stranger in the aisle. "Good afternoon, sir. If you want to see Mr. Legrand, sir, he won't be here till five o'clock."

"I do want to see Mr. Legrand, Remnant; but I want to see you first."

A slow light came into the little eyes in which the twinkle had long ago been extinguished. A slow smile, too, dawned behind the dejected gray mustache. "Why, if it ain't—" There was still some hesitation. "Why, if it ain't — you — sonny! — I mean—Mr. Charlie!—Mr. Grace, I mean!"

There was a mutual wringing of hands. "Well,

well, well, well!" expressed the joyous astonishment in Remnant's greeting. "Well, *well!* I'm as glad to see you, Mr. Charlie, as if somebody had give me a five-dollar bill. My, but you've grown—and looks handsome!—which I never thought you would! You was a pretty little boy, all right, and then you come up weedy. Ah, but I wish your pa could see you now—and your poor ma! Do you mind your poor ma, Mr. Charlie? She was a *lady*—too good for this world. Ah, them was times! Nothin' like it now. You'd drop tears, Mr. Charlie, to see what we've come to. They put their foot in it the day they invited your pa to skip. It's been down, down ever since. First one family to move away and then another! Now you may say as there's no one but me and Miss Smedley left—and she don't hardly count, poor old thing, with one foot in the grave. Religion is a poor investment—that's what I say. When I think of the money that's been sunk in this church!—and for what? For a crowd of low-down people—most of 'em furriners—that you wouldn't want to look at when you passed 'em in the street. There's no packin' o' missionary boxes now, sonny. It's t'other way round. Missionary boxes has to be packed for us. Think o' that! What 'u'd your poor pa have said to it?—swell up-town churches sending *us* their cast-offs! We ain't a church any more. We're a emigrant station. It's all sewing-classes, and cooking-classes, and classes for teaching English to Poles and Russians and Dagos and every other kind of riff-raff. Help 'em to be American citizens, Parson Legrand says. I'd American-citizen 'em if it was me. I'd jail 'em as fast as they come to the church

door. They don't come for nothin' but what they can get—and he don't see it, Parson Legrand don't. He's as simple as a babe unborn. They'll take him in every time, and then he'll let himself be took in again. It's all holler, Mr. Charlie, all holler. When I think of Mr. and Mrs. Hornblower sitting in the second pew from the front—behind your poor ma, that was—and Dr. and Mrs. Furnival behind them, and Mr. and Mrs. Pemberton behind them again, and Miss Smedley two pews from the front on the other side—and us looked up to all over New York —like a cathedral, you might say—and your pa preaching so loud you might ha' heard him over to Broadway — that was something like religion. There's no religion nowadays. The bottom's out of it. But it's good to see you again, Mr. Charlie. It's as auxilarating to me as if you was an angel come back from a better world."

Charlie Grace was too full of the subject that had brought him to give Remnant the sympathy he deserved. "You're to be the angel from a better world, Remnant," he said, jovially. "I want you to marry me."

Remnant took the information with a disappointing lack of enthusiasm. "Do you now? Well, I christened you, and confirmed you, so it's nothing but right that I should have this job, too. And please God, I'll bury you, if both of us lives so long. And who might you be thinking of marrying, Mr. Charlie? There's a very nice young lady here in the rectory. You wouldn't ha' thought Parson Legrand could ha' had such a nice young lady; but she takes after her ma."

Remnant's tone suggested that if the young man's

choice was not irrevocably made it might be worth while considering Miss Legrand.

"I'm afraid it's too late for that," Charlie Grace laughed. "My young lady is Miss Hilda Penrhyn, daughter of Mr. Anthony Penrhyn—"

Remnant nodded approval. "He's dead. They never come to this church, but they're good people. Glad you done so well. When might it be you was thinking of, Mr. Charlie? You'll want the bells rung, I suppose, and everything proper?"

There was further discussion of the ceremony, after which Charlie Grace went on to the rectory. On crossing the bit of greensward, now overlaid with snow, he felt curiously juvenile again. Childhood came back to him not so much with impressions of pleasure as with those of weakness, of anxiety. His mother became vivid to his memory as she had not been for nearly twenty years; but he saw her timid, apprehensive, pained. The weight of burdens he had long ago thrown off descended upon him in retrospect, bringing a wave of resentment not only against the spot, but against the interests that centered round it. Whether they stood for truth or error was a matter of indifference; he hated them just the same.

Though in its exterior the rectory was grimier than it used to be, he noticed at once that it displayed a more modern taste within. In the hall, where, in his time, the conspicuous objects had been an old leather-covered sofa and one or two chairs not good enough to be put anywhere else, there was a spindle-legged table holding a decorative plate as card-receiver and a grandfather's clock. In the drawing-room, which he remembered as adorned by

a Brussels carpet strewn with roses and ferns of gigantic size, there was now a hardwood floor sparsely covered with inexpensive Oriental rugs. Spindle-legged furniture obtained here also, while art fabrics screened the Gothic windows. He was far from expert as to interior decoration, but he gathered that, with the aid of the literature on that subject which was beginning to be abundant, some one in the house was rather pathetically trying to keep abreast of the domestic fashions of the day. Having been invited by a neat but elementary Irish girl to "put his name in the dish till she saw if there was any one at hoame," he was now waiting for the results of this mission to be made known to him.

A rapid step on the stair was followed by the appearance in the room of a tall girl, with reddish hair, a bright complexion, and a sweet, cheery smile. He knew her at once by the quick, lithe movements her mother had had before her. There was something of animal grace in them, and yet the grace of no animal he could think of, unless it were of collies bounding on the grass. She held out her hand cordially.

"I'm so sorry mother isn't at home," she said, easily, without shyness. "Won't you sit down? Father will be in after service. Service is at five."

Charlie Grace felt slightly embarrassed. He was not used to young girls. The women who had attracted him had been more or less mature, and generally older than himself. He sat down awkwardly on one of the spindle-legged chairs as he said:

"I wanted to see Mr. Legrand on rather important business."

"If you could wait till about half past five—"

"Oh yes, I can do that."

He noticed that she was wearing a hat and gloves. He observed, too, that she was rather richly dressed, in dark-blue velvet trimmed with fur. Possibly the costume was a little worn and of a style not that of the current year. A floating recollection came back to him that when she was a child she was clad from the wardrobes of wealthier relatives. The reflection passed through his mind that it was a pity so noble a girl couldn't have what was befitting her.

He saw she was a noble girl as he looked at her a second time and a third. Her coloring was lovelier than her mother's had been in that it was richer and less evanescent. Her features were stronger, too, —suggestive of her father's ascetic countenance, and hinting at reserves of will. The mouth had the strength and richness of the other features—with full red lips, like the petals of a rose. From the cells of memory he drew the recollection that Hattie Bright had once said of this girl's eyes that you couldn't tell whether they were blue or black, recording the fact that this was so. If he had had to affirm that they were one or the other he would have said they were of the deepest shade of purple pansies, with the softness of the velvet she had on.

He reverted to the circumstance that she was wearing a hat and gloves. "I mustn't keep you in if you are going out."

"I was only going into the church—to play the organ for service. I've plenty of time; and it wouldn't matter if I was late, as the hymn doesn't come till near the end. I can always slip in by the side door. I suppose you remember that?"

He was able to make conversation by telling of

the uses to which he had been accustomed to put the side door, with its free access to Remnant. They talked of Remnant, and of his inability to adapt himself to changed times and manners. "Of course it isn't the same sort of parish at all now," she explained. "If it had been father wouldn't have come back to it. We left Trenton because at St. Philip's there was none of this kind of work. Not that he doesn't think there must be churches to minister more particularly to the rich; only he feels that his call is to the poor."

She said this so earnestly that he was moved to ask: "And is yours, too?"

Her blue-black eyes flung him a glance that was both frank and good-humored. "Yes; by proxy. So long as it's father's call it's mine."

"That is, you don't take to it naturally," he ventured.

"Not by first nature; only by second. But second can be pretty good."

"You mean that, being obliged to do it, you do it as well as you can."

"Oh, you get interested. You really do. There are so many sorts—and so many needs—and they're so like children—especially when they first come here. You can't imagine anything more helpless than they are—both men and women—for the first year or so after they arrive. They're wonderfully weak and touching. You simply have to mother them—you simply *have* to."

"And do *you* mother them?"

"Oh, I grandmother them. You've no idea how they look up to me. I can often make them do things when father can't—and poor mother has

never been able to bear the smells in their kitchens. I don't wonder at that. I couldn't, either, if I wasn't used to it."

"What kind of things do you do for them?"

She laughed. "It would be easier to ask me what kind of things I don't do for them. I could make the list briefer. Why, I do—*anything*. It's never twice the same. Except for the classes in different things no two days are alike."

He was growing interested. "Well, to-day, for example?"

"To-day? Let me think. This morning I was in at Blum & Rosenbaum's—that's the artificial-flower place you passed just before you came to St. David's Building—the big block next the church. I was there to see a young Polish girl who's been giving her mother trouble—"

"About a young man, I presume."

She flung him another of her good-humored glances, this time with a dash of surprise in it. "Yes, about a young man. How well you know! You ought to be doing this work yourself. I wanted her to promise me not to go to a certain dance-hall—where she meets the young man, of course—without her mother's consent."

"And did you succeed?"

"Not yet; but I shall. Halka is fonder of me than of any young man she knows—yet."

"And then—after you left Halka?"

"Then I went to see a woman with a consumptive son—a boy of seventeen. We want her to let us take him to a little home up in the Catskills where he'd probably get better. He's only in the first stages of it yet, and the doctor says there'd be a

very good chance for him if she'd let him go. But the poor thing adores him—and wants to keep him, naturally enough—and they have only one room besides the kitchen—and four other children—so you can see for yourself—"

He could see for himself, and told her so. "And you're the organist, besides?"

"Only on week-days. We have a man on Sundays," she added, proudly; "but I help to train the choir. Just now I must help to get the tea," she went on, springing up and pulling off her gloves, "if you won't mind sitting still while I do it. We keep the tea-things right here, as it makes less trouble for Julia."

"There was a Julia in my day."

"Yes; Julia Corkery. That Julia died about four years ago. We used to hope she'd marry Remnant, but the question of religion interfered. And Remnant never seems to have wanted to marry. In his way he's complete in himself."

With a question or two he led her back to the classes. She answered him while she spread a fancy tea-cloth on a spindle-legged table, and took cups and saucers from their hiding-place in a corner cabinet.

"Oh, we don't attempt much—just what we can do. We throw our strength into cooking and sewing and teaching English. We succeed best in the last two, because you don't need a 'plant,' as manufacturers say. For cooking you require at least a kitchen—and we've only a couple of gas-stoves at one end of the schoolroom. Some day we hope to have a parish-house, and then we shall do all sorts of things. I want to start a laundry class—but, you

see, we need a 'plant' for that. Don't you think a laundry class would be perfectly splendid?"

Further discussion was cut short by the return of Mrs. Legrand. The girl left her task of arranging the tea-things to run to her mother in the hall. "Mother, who do you think is here? Mr. Grace—old Dr. Grace's son."

There was a hurried throwing off of outer wraps, and a still more hurried entry, as a plump lady bustled in, with both hands outstretched.

"Charlie, this is perfectly delightful, don't you know it is? I thought you'd forgotten all—all—about us. We've so often talked of you, and wondered whether we should ever see you again. But you're such a great man now—and such a rich one—and we're so out of everything we expected to be in—and so lost in this frightful slum—that no one ever— But do sit down. Esther, why doesn't Julia bring the tea? Do sit down, do! I can't half tell you how delighted I am, don't you know I can't?—and Mr. Legrand will be quite as glad as I am. Let me see! How many years is it since we've met?"

He made a rapid computation while Mrs. Legrand, throwing back her veil and taking off her gloves, settled herself at the tea-table. "Just fourteen," he replied.

She examined him, while Julia brought in the tea-pot, and Esther busied herself with bread-and-butter and cakes. "And how you've changed!"

"*You* haven't, Mrs. Legrand," he was gallant enough to declare.

Her smile reminded him of the pretty giggle of former years. "Oh yes, I have. I'm stouter. Yes; I'm really stouter—"

"That's hardly the word; a wee bit more matronly, perhaps—"

"And this great girl of nearly eighteen—"

"Nearly nineteen, mother."

"Is it nineteen, dearest? Why, yes, it is. You see," she went on, addressing the young man, "I can't realize that she's almost grown up, because she's never come out. That's what marks the difference between childhood and womanhood to my mind. A girl who's never come out is to my mind still in the schoolroom, don't you know she is? But what can one do in a slum of this kind? I keep asking my husband to tell me that. I keep asking him to tell me what's to become of Esther—how she's to have a life—how she's to have a *life*—Lemon or cream, Charlie? Cream? And sugar? No sugar. Tell me if that's strong enough. I keep asking my husband—"

"Oh, mother dear, Mr. Grace doesn't care anything about that."

"Mr. Grace cares a great deal about that," said Mr. Grace himself. "He knew you when you were in your cradle. Don't you want to come out—and have a good time?"

"The two things don't necessarily go together," she replied, promptly. "Of course I should like it—if everything was different from what it is." She had taken her tea without sitting down, and now made an excuse for running away. "I've a lot of little things to do in the church," she explained to her mother, who protested. "I must see to the altar-linen for Sunday—"

"Another thing you do?" Charlie Grace asked, with a smile.

"Nominally Miss Smedley does it—you remember old Miss Smedley, don't you? But as a matter of fact the poor old thing doesn't get out very often, so I look after it for her. It gives her something to scold me about—and she likes that, the poor old dear."

"Such spirits," the mother sighed, as soon as the girl had gone, "and such energy. It simply breaks my heart to see it so misapplied, so thrown away. But what can I do? I do everything I can—I assure you I do. If it wasn't for me we should be buried alive. You know what relations can be—how unfeeling. We're both connected with all the best families in New York; but Esther is kept out of her rightful place by Mr. Legrand's madness to live in this frightful slum. You've no idea how the neighborhood has changed. I didn't know neighborhoods *could* change so. If I had the slightest notion of it I should never have agreed to leaving Trenton. Trenton was bad enough—so far from all the people one knows. I died of homesickness during all the years we lived there. I thought that if we could only get back to New York!—but this isn't New York. It's Poland, or Russia, or Italy, or whatever country you like—but it *isn't* New York. And my friends can't come here, don't you know they can't? I might as well be in the heart of a forest, as far as they're concerned. And Esther's young life ruined. Ruined is not too strong a term. She never sees any one—or goes anywhere—or has any amusement—"

"Do you mean that she never goes to the theater or the opera, or anything like that?"

"Anything like that! Why, she's never been to

the opera in her life, and not more than two or three times to the theater. And *that* was in Trenton."

He looked shocked. It was the sort of deprivation that appealed to his pity. "But that's perfectly awful. Couldn't she come with me? Couldn't you both come?" The brightening of the lady's face encouraged him to continue. "I'll tell you what we'll do. We'll have a little dinner first—just the three of us—at the Blitz or the Monico—and we'll go on to the opera afterward. We'll do it the very first evening you're free."

"Oh, we're free any evening. Esther has her classes, of course; but we could arrange for that. It's really too kind of you, Charlie. If you weren't such a very old friend I shouldn't think of letting you— But the poor child has been longing so to go to the opera—just once in her life—if no more— And so many of our relatives have boxes—only they never ask us—living in this slum—"

The poor lady's lips quivered so pitifully that he interrupted her by asking for a newspaper, so that he might consult the program for the week. While she rose to find one he could note more carefully the changes which can come over a pretty woman in the course of fourteen years. His memory went back even to 1874, when she was the object of his adoration and a bride. He could easily conjure up the vision of her spun-sugar chignon, her rose-leaf complexion, her rustle of blue flounces, and her Grecian bend, for the matron of forty-eight conserved as much of the archness of the bride of twenty-three as was consistent with a fretful spirit, a triple chin, and the development of embonpoint. By the time they had studied the paper and fixed

on "Faust" for a night in the following week as the most suitable opportunity for Esther's introduction to opera the minute had come for him to proceed to the vestry for his interview with Mr. Legrand. He felt that before going he ought to mention the nature of his errand to his hostess; but something held him back. Perhaps it was Remnant's suggestion of the nice young lady in the rectory; perhaps it was a subtle sense that the announcement might bring a discordant note into what had been a pleasant meeting; perhaps he was a little fatuous in thinking that Mrs. Legrand's imagination might be leaping ahead to future impossibilities; in any case, Mr. Legrand would be in a position to inform the family as soon as he, Charlie Grace, had gone.

His reception in the vestry was not less cordial, on another plane, than it had been in the house. Time had rendered the present rector of St. David's more spare and more ascetic, but had left him just as straight and tall. Into the face—not so much wrinkled as deeply scored—life had brought something which Charlie Grace did not remember as having been there before. It might have been a new gentleness or a new severity—he was not sure which. Undoubtedly the eyes were more searching—with the concentrated spiritual light generated by the scrutiny of souls. Wearing his cassock, and standing erect beside a high-backed Gothic chair, he was, so the younger man thought, the embodiment of the claims and exactions of the Church.

Once more Charlie Grace had a curious sense of juvenility. In that vestry, which was the one unchanged spot he had seen in Vandiver Place, he went back twenty years. His figure seemed to shrivel

into knickerbockers, while he could again feel his soul struggling with the majestic problems which the round of Advent, Christmas, and Easter presented, unable to view them otherwise than through the luridness of his youthful sins. Even before he had shaken hands with Rufus Legrand he was conscious of a pang of pity for his childhood, for its gravity, its awesomeness, its spiritual wistfulness. He had never been wholly light-hearted, with the light-heartedness he had known as a man. Life had been solemn; death had seemed near; the very frequency of funerals had given his early years the accompaniment of a lugubrious pomp. The aisles and galleries, as he had passed through the nave just now, still re-echoed with chants and refrains only partially of this world. And *he* was wholly of this world! That was the point at which his resentment began. He was earthly, materialistic, persuaded only of what his eye could see. He had attained to this freedom with difficulty, as a self-taught man acquires education. It was through conflicts, growths, and eliminations, through efforts, not always easy, to cast away the husks after conviction that there was no fruit therein. What he resented was the fact that this struggle had been forced on him—not by his father, nor by any individual, but by the system into touch with which he had once more come. Had he been born free he would not have suffered from the scars he was conscious of carrying—he would not have had to recognize the harsh discrepancies between life as it had begun for him and life as he was living it. He would have liked his career to have been smooth, consistent, all of one piece, whereas it was disfigured by violences

and disruptions, which, however justifiable from his point of view, caused him an inner discomfort.

These thoughts, which were always incoherently present in his heart, focused themselves during the few minutes of his talk with Rufus Legrand into an acute feeling of hostility to most of the ideals the tall ecclesiastic represented and St. David's sheltered beneath its roof. The feeling broke into words as soon as it was settled that Hilda's selection of the Tuesday after Easter at three o'clock would be convenient for the church authorities. The impulse on which Charlie Grace spoke now was not unlike that which, years ago—in this very room, to this very man, sitting on this very chair—had led him to voice his objections to being confirmed. He tried to think it a case of conscientious frankness, though in the back of his mind he knew he was only seeking expressions for his aggressive repugnance to spiritual rites.

"You've always been so kind to me, sir, that I feel I ought to say that I don't consider this religious ceremony necessary at all. As far as I'm concerned a civil marriage would be just as effective and would better suit my opinions. I feel it's only fair to tell you that."

The tall figure in the Gothic chair bowed slightly, with the glimmer of a smile. Thinking it over afterward, Charlie Grace could not say whether it was an illuminated smile, or a tolerant smile, or a sardonic smile—but he was sure there was more in it than just a smile.

"But I presume Miss Penrhyn would consider the religious service essential?"

Charlie Grace admitted that this was so.

"Then, that's all I need to know. In cases of this kind, if one of the contracting parties desires the blessing of the Church, he or she has a right to have it."

Legrand's tone as he paused seemed to imply that there was no more to be said. As on the occasion when they had talked of confirmation, the younger man felt dissatisfied with this way of letting the subject drop. He would have liked more made of it. He was not polemically inclined, but there were questions on which he enjoyed airing his opinions, especially with people who held contrary convictions. Here in this vestry, above all places, he was impelled to strike a blow at conceptions he believed inimical to progress. He tried to provoke discussion tactfully by saying:

"I thought it only right to tell you that, sir—though I suppose it doesn't make much difference."

"None at all—except to yourself."

Charlie Grace thought he saw an opening. "It hasn't made any difference to me whatever. Or, rather," he corrected, "it's made this difference, that since I've given up—all this"—his gesture seemed to cover the whole site of St. David's—"I've felt freer—more of a man."

His tone was subtly inquiring, as though asking the question "How do you account for that?" Legrand declined, however, to take the challenge up, uttering only the word, "Indeed!" very politely. Charlie Grace was impelled to struggle on.

"I know you won't agree with me, sir—but you've always been a sort of father confessor to me—so I hope you won't mind my speaking out. As a matter of fact—since giving up the Church—or Christianity

—however you choose to put it—I've felt more reverent—in that I've abandoned a lot of assumptions and presumptions which, it seems to me, no one had any right to make, in the first place."

There was a pause. With his elbows on the arms of his chair Legrand fitted the tips of his fingers together, the glimmering smile still on his lips. "That must fortify you in your position," he said, at last.

Giving up as useless the attempt to draw his old friend out, Charlie Grace turned the conversation on the kindly personal themes in which he was more at home, and presently took his leave. On his way back to the hotel he rehearsed the incidents of the afternoon in such a way as to give a coherent account of them to Hilda.

In this connection he dwelt specially on the pleasure she would have in hearing about Esther Legrand.

"I've never in my life seen a human being who tugged more piteously at one's heart-strings," were the words he used of her, as he sat beside Miss Penrhyn on the big mahogany sofa in the Merediths' drawing-room that evening. He had dined with the Meredith family for the second or third time since Hilda had become their guest. For the moment the hostess and her daughters had obligingly dispersed in order to give the lovers a half-hour to themselves.

Having uttered the words in sincere enthusiasm, he was surprised to see what he could only describe as a lick of flame shoot out of Hilda's eyes. It reminded him of nothing so much as a blaze at the window of some seemingly tranquil house, showing it is on fire within. He had an instant's fear of having

made some mistake, but became reassured when she said, quietly:

"How interesting! Tell me about her."

He went on to do as invited. "She's just the type you'd admire. She's a beautiful girl—really beautiful—in a style one doesn't often see. I mean, one doesn't often see so much beauty with so much character—or so much character in any one so young. You see what I mean? It's the combination—the whole thing. She's a creature of extraordinary energy—you can see that from the things she does—and yet she's touching—appealing. What do you think? She's never been to the opera in her life—and only two or three times to a theater."

In making this announcement he was so overcome by the yound lady's lack of privileges as not to notice that the flame in Miss Penrhyn's regard was now playing on him in rapid, lambent flashes like summer lightning. She smiled, however, her slow, dreamy, distant smile, as she said: "How dreadful! I wonder you don't take her."

"That's just what I'm going to do—next week—to 'Faust.'"

Miss Penrhyn changed her position, sitting more erect, opening with a quick, rustling flutter, like the whirr of a rising partridge, her large black fan. She fanned herself slowly while he went on:

"Don't you think that good old 'Faust' would make the best beginning for her? Melba's to sing, and Jean de Reszke, and Plançon, and little Bauermeister. Don't you think that that's starting in well for any one who's never seen an opera before?"

She fanned herself slowly. He noticed now that he had never seen her eyes so brilliant. They shot

out rays like those that come from fire-opals or from amber. "Did you say anything to her about —*me?*"

He came down from the sky of his enthusiasm to a solid, frozen earth. He remembered with uneasiness his hesitation of the afternoon. He couldn't see at once the bearings of his omission to inform Mrs. Legrand of his engagement, but he knew vaguely that the circumstance might create mental or emotional complications. He was uncomfortable. He colored. "I told the father," he explained, lamely.

"That was after, wasn't it? If I understand you rightly, you saw these ladies first. Not that it matters," she added, indifferently. "I only wondered."

"You see," he went on, nervously, "I knew that —with your mourning—and one thing and another—you couldn't come to dinner at the Blitz—"

"Oh, there's to be a dinner, too! How delightful!"

"Yes—a little dinner at the Blitz. At the Blitz," he repeated, apologetically. He began to wonder whether he had been guilty of some blundering social solecism. "Just a little dinner—she and her mother and I. It won't be—it won't be— Well, it won't be what you'd call *gay*. It will be very simple —just before we go on to the opera. You understand, don't you? It will be just a beginning for the evening—so as not to be too abrupt. You see, she's never been to a big restaurant like that—never. It will be something new for her—"

"And for you," she said, sweetly. "Won't it?"

"It won't be half as good fun as staying here with

you, Hilda, darling; but, you see, I've known the Legrands all my life—"

"I thought you said you hadn't seen this girl since she was a baby. That's hardly knowing her all your life, is it?"

He began to feel as he had felt once or twice when lost in a fog or a snow-storm on the prairie, with a thickened atmosphere about him and neither sun nor moon to show him the points of the compass. He asked himself if it was possible that Hilda would have liked to be included in the company. "You wouldn't come, would you?" he said, earnestly. "No; I thought not," he went on, as she shook her head. "That's why I didn't speak of it from the first."

"You're very considerate. You always are. Angelica," she called to the eldest Miss Meredith, who happened to pass the drawing-room door. "Do come here. Mr. Grace has been telling me of such a wonderful girl he's been meeting. She's a Miss Legrand, daughter of the present rector of St. David's."

Miss Meredith came discreetly to the threshold, holding in her hand the book she had finished binding. She was the artistic one of the talented Meredith sisters. She did book-binding and painted portraits. Miss Elinor did fancy needlework and gave imitations of popular actors and actresses. Miss Edith played the violin and worked in a philanthropic settlement. Miss Meredith was short and round, with a shortness and a roundness dissimulated just now under draperies suggestive of a Grecian peplum. They were white embroidered with gold, and fell over her plump little bosom like tapestries

from a festive balcony. Her fair hair was done in a tight little Grecian knot, in a style unbecoming to her little round face, with its little round mouth and little, wide-open eyes that were like two brand-new silver coins. She spoke rapidly, with the revolving articulation of a person who has something too hot in the mouth.

"Do you know her, Mr. Grace? Oh, c-lan't you get her to sit to me? I've wanted her to sit to me ever since the evening I saw her at the Bleecker Street Settlement House. It was a concert for the girls. Edith played. This Miss Legrand was there. You ought to hear Edith. She raves about her. She's lovely, isn't she, Mr. Grace?—Miss Legrand. Did you notice her hair? No? I don't see how you could help it. It's the most c-lurious hair. If it was a little redder it would be red. But it isn't red. It isn't any c-lolor I can give a name to. And then her eyes. They're the real violet eyes you read about in books and never see. And did you notice the whiteness of her skin?—where it *is* white. No? why, you didn't notice anything. It's the whiteness of the white rose—not the porcelain whiteness that generally goes with reddish hair. Not that her hair *is* red. It isn't. And it isn't golden—and it isn't auburn—and it isn't chestnut, like yours, Hilda. It's as if nature couldn't decide what to make it, and so made a little of all three. Isn't it a pity she has such a silly mother? It works against her. The Van Iderstines and the Peter Legrands would do something for her if the mother didn't get on their nerves. But I c-lount on you to get her to sit to me, Mr. Grace. It 'll give me the ch-lance of a lifetime."

"So you see Miss Meredith agrees with me," Charlie Grace said, triumphantly, as that lady passed down the hall.

But Hilda, from whose eyes the lambent fire had suddenly gone out, had become dreamy, silent, and let the subject drop.

CHAPTER VI

THOUGH Miss Penrhyn did not speak again of Esther Legrand, Charlie Grace lived through the days that had to pass before the dinner at the Blitz and the visit to the opera in a state of mind resembling that of guilt. If it was not wholly that of guilt it was because he succeeded in convincing himself of his freedom from social indiscretion. That was what he had charged himself with first. He had committed some blunder of taste. He had extended an invitation which the canons of etiquette could not sanction. His very anxiety to do nothing that would shock New York rendered him sensitive to the possibility. If from his seemingly innocent enterprise, he reasoned, Hilda kept herself detached, it was probably because she saw it in the light in which it would be viewed by their fellow-townsmen.

It took him a day or two to think the case out in all its bearings, and to assure himself that when a respectable young man invited two respectable ladies to a respectable place of entertainment the proceeding could be justified even by standards so rigorous as those of the metropolis. Reassured on that point, he was driven back on the fact that in matters of personal conduct—of wholly legitimate conduct—he had now another will to consider besides his own. The discovery was not without its startling elements. It was a new idea that Hilda might act as a restraint

on a private liberty which had hitherto acknowledged no restraint at all. That he should from time to time make concessions to her wishes he had taken for granted. He might accept her advice in delicate matters and submit to her guidance in questions of right and wrong. He could also conceive of himself as being good-naturedly led by her caprice when the woman in her called for indulgence. She should never have to fear unkindness on his part, or anything but the more loving forms of coercion of the will. To take every care from her heart, every burden from her shoulders, every task from her hands, and show her sumptuous and splendid and idle before the world as the outward and visible embodiment of his success, was a large part of his ideal in marriage. It was incredible that any one toward whom his good intentions were so sincere should go out of her way to find unnecessary discords.

He was far from making this last assertion with regard to Hilda, but he couldn't conceal from himself the fact that her mind was at work on the minutiæ of his life. To her concern for the great principles by which he lived he had no objection. He had more than once invited her to discussion of those themes, chiefly with the desire to convert her. Even without converting her he acknowledged that the whole sphere of interest was debatable ground. But it was quite another matter to have her enter with an inquiring mind—an inquiring mind endowed with judgments of its own—into his intimate, sacred realm of little nothings. That might become alarming. He could hardly imagine an existence in which his wife would care to know how he filled in the

hours not spent in her society. It was not so much that he would deny her the right to know as that he would consider the wish to know unwarrantable. It would be intrusive, indelicate. Life was full of things too trivial to make a secret of, and yet too personal to share. It was also full of things too important to be trivial, and yet too immaterial to excite opinions either pro or contra. It was under the last heading that he would have classed his invitation to the ladies Legrand. It was inconceivable to him why she should object to it; it was scarcely conceivable to him why she should have a thought about it at all. He would have said offhand that it was as far outside the domain of her preoccupations as her discussions with the Misses Meredith as to how she should dress for her wedding were outside the domain of his.

To do Hilda justice he had to admit that, except for the flames of opal and amber in her eyes—fires that were doubtless beyond her control—and a certain brevity in response to his enthusiasm, he had no complaint to make of her as to either word or deed. As a matter of fact, the sense of her disapprobation by which he felt himself interpenetrated was too subtle to be conveyed by word or deed, or any of the grosser forms of communication. It came neither by the eye nor by the touch nor in the air. It reached him by avenues both extra-mental and extra-sensuous. It was as though he had been suddenly endued with spiritual antennæ of a delicacy to transcend all the faculties of the flesh and supersede them. He was like one who trod on air, but on an air more vitally charged with meanings than a cloud can be charged with electricity—meanings

he took in by the mere contact of his being—in a manner both wonderful and disturbing. He could not walk by Hilda's side, nor sit with her at the table, nor hear her discourse on pictures or music or Lenten services with the Misses Meredith, without feeling his whole soul exposed to the processes of her thought on the subject of his dinner to Esther Legrand. They swept about him and over him and through him, in his sleep and in his waking, in his downsitting and his uprising, wave on wave of—what was it?—it was scarcely censure—it was too subtly distilled to be disquietude—wave on wave of divine reproach that at such a minute—on the eve of marriage—he could have had the consciousness of any woman but herself.

He reached this perception at last with delicious throbs of flattery, of security. If Hilda did him the honor to be a little jealous—the word, as applied to her, was coarse, but he could find no other—the obvious inference was that she loved him more than she had been willing to admit. The situation was one of which he had previous experience. He knew how to deal with it. Attentions, subservience, flowers, jewels—jewels in particular—were powerful aids in making the crooked straight. If from certain angles he saw Hilda as a goddess, he regarded her from others as a woman of flesh and blood. It was from the latter point of view that he approached her now—and with some success. She liked the jewels, she loved the flowers, she rejoiced in the attentions and subservience. He offered them all with a sincere humility, with a timid awkwardness, that touched her. When the evening for the dinner at the Blitz came round he felt that if he did not pre-

cisely go to it with her blessing on the party he had at least administered an anodyne to her misgivings.

But scarcely was the sense of guilt dispelled from one side before it was borne in on him from another. The dinner had the success of all things brilliantly done, against a brilliant background. It was graced, moreover, by the sheer human pleasure of a young girl's delight in her first glimpse of the gayer aspects of the world. Everything dazzled her from the minute of entering the great room, with its softened lights, its hues of gray and rose, its music, its movement, its hum of talk. It was like coming into some magic palace as secure from care as the groves of the Decameron from the pestilence. She had never imagined that in crossing the sea of night-schools and sewing-classes and cooking-classes and entertainments for neglected girls on which she was embarked one could touch at such Happy Isles as this and be so gloriously care-free. Beauty and luxury moved her less than the odd sensation that the weight under which she was accustomed to see poor human things borne down was temporarily lifted. It was inspiriting to know that in the whole world there were so many bright beings, apparently exempt from penury and anxiety, as clustered round the neighboring tables. It was an entirely new view of life. It was like an earnest of the sublimation of the race, a foretaste of universal rescue.

Charlie Grace had the satisfaction of being proud of both of his companions. The mysterious sources of finery on which Mrs. Legrand was privileged to draw had offered of their best for the occasion. The elder lady was dignified in black velvet that heightened the value of her still pretty complexion while

tempering her buxomness. Esther swam into the orbit of the diners in pale green veiled by diaphanous, lacy things that, as she moved, threw an aura round her, like a circle about the moon. At each of the small, rose-lighted tables there was a cessation of activities when she passed, eyes lifted, lips parted with a quick "Who's that?" when speech began to flow again. On taking their places at the table he noticed the details to which Miss Meredith had drawn his attention—the white-rose texture of the neck, the bosom, the arms, the dusky bronze-gold of the hair. He might have called the latter reddish, if left to his unaided perceptions; but since Miss Meredith had given him points concerning it, he could do justice to her superior knowledge. His chief regret was that Hilda could not have been with them, to be convinced of the reasonableness of his admiration.

They talked little, and only Charlie Grace himself could be said to eat. For the two women it was meat enough to gaze about them, with eyes that missed no detail of significance, from the table appointments to the toilets of the ladies within their range of view. In regard to the latter Mrs. Legrand was troubled, perhaps, by the thought that their own costumes, however carefully "freshened up," could scarcely be in the latest mode, while she speculated as to the possibility of any one in that gay assembly being able to recognize them as worn by belles of the Van Iderstine family two years before.

It was toward the end of the dinner that Esther whispered: "Why, mother, there's Mr. Hornblower —with a lady and gentleman. Over there—a little behind Mr. Grace."

Mrs. Legrand raised her lorgnette and looked. "I've seen her before," she observed, "though I can't remember where. Sleeves really do seem to be growing quite small," she continued, with a nervous glance at the *bouffant* grace of Esther's shoulders and a shrinking effort of her own.

The conversation, such as it was, turned on Reggie and Fanny Hornblower, of whom the host was glad to obtain the latest news. Fanny was abroad, had been abroad ever since her mother's death the previous year. She had come in for both the house in Fifth Avenue and the Long Island estate. She had never married—probably because she was so plain. She was always liberal with money for undertakings at St. David's, but she was now a parishioner at St. Bartholomew's. Reggie had inherited the banking business, though Mrs. Legrand fancied he didn't attend to it much. There were, however, the other partners to do that. She had heard he was—But you couldn't believe everything you heard, didn't Charlie know you couldn't? As far as she saw he was a very nice young fellow—though he looked a little as if he drank. They had seen something of him after his mother's death, when he and Fanny had put up the reredos at St. David's as a memorial to their parents.

"And we did so hope it would be a parish house—father and I did," Esther broke in, earnestly. "We could do without the reredos, but the parish house—"

Charlie Grace had an inspiration. "Suppose I gave you that?"

"Oh, Mr. Grace—"

"Now, now, dearest! Mr. Grace is only in fun."

"I'm not so sure of that. Let's think about it."

After reflection he added: "I couldn't do it now; but if, when I come back to New York, no one else has done it—"

He left his sentence uncompleted, and they talked of other things. He kept saying to himself, however: "Why not?" It might be the very thing he was in search of—a means of avenging his father's memory. A benevolent institution, a "William Grace Memorial," right on the spot whence he had been driven out would be coals of fire not merely on the head but in the eyes. Unfortunately, those who had been active in bringing about his father's humiliation were dying off; but some of them were still left, and there was still left, above all, the great system that had accepted his father's services and used him up, only to cast him aside to die of what amounted to a broken heart. A William Grace Memorial might really answer many purposes. It would preserve his father's name in the very center of New York; it would do a little good; and its foundation might be for Charlie Grace himself an outlet to irritations and resentments which got no expression in his present attitude of aloofness. He didn't want to be ungenerous; he wanted only to assert himself; he wanted, as an act of sheer filial piety, to re-establish his father's fame as one who had done good work according to the lights of his day and generation. If there were people left alive who would be vexed by his so doing—then all the better. He could think of at least ten or a dozen of the former worshipers at St. David's whom he knew to be still in the flesh, and of whom he hoped devoutly that they would continue to live on. It was a secondary thought that if he were to go in for

philanthropic action of this sort it would give Hilda pleasure, and bring again the swimming look of joy into Esther Legrand's violet eyes that he had seen just now.

The subject was not one on which he could dwell there and then. He was obliged to put it aside for further meditation as he paid his bill—as unobtrusively as possible, out of regard for his guests—and follow Mrs. and Miss Legrand from the restaurant to be in time for "Faust." He took the opportunity as he passed to glance in the direction of the table at which he understood Reggie Hornblower to be sitting. One of its occupants was a stranger, but he recognized Reggie by his slim, well-tailored back. He recognized the lady, too, though full comprehension didn't come all at once. She was a beautiful woman, with negligently arranged fair hair of the flaxen shade that boldly disdains the limited hues of nature, and the full but not excessive development commonly called statuesque. A corsage of wine-colored velvet, cut in a simple, sweeping curve, displayed the splendor of a bust on which Charlie Grace caught subconsciously the flash of diamonds. Her eyes rested on him for a minute questioningly, as his on her. He had almost passed before she inclined her head, slowly, doubtfully, as though not sure of his identity—possibly as though not sure of a response. He had bowed in return, doubtfully, like her, and had gone by before he found himself saying: "Good Lord, it's Hattie! Hattie Bright!"

It was another subject to reserve for future consideration. For the moment he had enough to do in fulfilling the task of squire of dames, to which he was

not entirely accustomed, and in conveying his charges to their stalls.

It was one of those evenings that made the nineties memorable in the history of New York. The time had not yet come when singers pieced out their talents by being singing-actors and singing-actresses. Audiences, too, enthralled by melody, were inexacting as to deficiences of other kinds. Using their imaginations, they beheld in a stout, middle-age Faust making love to a matronly Marguerite the embodiment of youthful seductiveness as easily as an Elizabethan public saw the Forest of Arden by means of the name painted on a sign-post. From the point of view of later and more sophisticated days many things may have been lacking to the performance of Gounod's venerable opera under the direction of Maurice Grau, but it is certain that Esther saw them not. From the moment when, out of the darkness of the laboratory, Jean de Reszke's velvety voice brought the wistful despair of an old, old man—

Rien! En vain j'interroge, en mon ardente veille
La Nature et le Créateur—

she sat as one under a spell. Having carefully studied her libretto during the day, she was transported to the medieval German town as effectively as in dreams she was sometimes wafted to ball-rooms where she danced with engaging young men. Following with intensest sympathy the ancient philosopher's longings, she thrilled with the proper alarm as Plançon's giant red figure and sinister black plume suddenly sprang into the limelight. "*Me voici! D'où vient ta surprise?*" Later, when a

lady, whose maturity of bust contradicted the youthfulness of her long fair Saxon plaits, emerged from the wings, clasping a prayer-book to her breast with an air impossibly demure, Miss Legrand was lost to the world in the age-old tragedy of love, betrayal, and punishment.

This absorption enabled Mrs. Legrand, who was seated on Charlie Grace's right, to whisper an occasional confidence in the young man's ear without exposing herself to Esther's indiscreet attention. Mrs. Legrand, too, was in a state of ecstasy, but a purely social ecstasy. The musical and dramatic features of the evening were negligible elements in her content. It was all one to her whether the opera were "Faust" or "Götterdämmerung." She dismissed the celebrities on the stage once her curiosity was satisfied with a glimpse of them. Jean de Reszke was stouter than she had expected, and Melba not as good-looking as her pictures. Plançon she admired for his height and the easy grace with which he moved. All the rest of her pleasure was in the simple fact of being there. She was in her rightful place—among the rich, the fashionable, the well-born. She was where she, a Van Iderstine, had expected to be when she married a Legrand. It could not have been predicted even of a Legrand who was a clergyman that he would contemn the privileges of which Providence had made him heir. He had been a handsome clergyman, and she had fallen in love with him. She had married not a clergyman, but a man. If she could have chosen she would have preferred a man in almost any other of the upper walks in life. But allowing for all this, it was beyond every possible calculation that Mr. Legrand

would have put her by his own extraordinary wilfulness in the obscure position she was now compelled to take.

Happily, this was an occasion on which such sorrows could momentarily be set aside. She was there. She could see and be seen. At least, she hoped she could be seen. The Peter Legrands were in their box, and the Kermit Van Iderstines in theirs. It was a burning grief that, though she was a relative of the latter family, and Rufus of the former one, neither she nor Esther had ever been asked to occupy a superfluous seat in either shrine—in spite of the assiduity of her calls. It would be a genuine consolation if, looking down from their insolent perches, her kinsfolk could see her now, with the most lovely girl in the whole house—a girl whom people were craning their necks to look at from the other end of the row of stalls—and a handsome young man as their cavalier. Who knew but that Esther would one day have a box of her own?—and that she, Mrs. Legrand herself, might not be emulating Mrs. Kermit Van Iderstine's languid indifference to the seat of honor in the front row, through sheer surfeit of the privilege? It was this last thought that spurred her to take advantage of the lull in the action caused by Plançon's bows in response to the applause following on his rendering of the "Veau d'Or," to whisper to her companion:

"You must come and dine with us some evening." Then, as Charlie Grace interrupted the enthusiastic clapping of his hands to nod, rather than utter, his assent, she added: "It won't be like this evening, of course. This has been such a treat—you can't think. But you know the old rectory—don't you

know you do? — and you'll have to take us as we are."

The point being settled, she took the opportunity when there was nothing more lively going on than Melba's singing of "*Il était un roi de Thulé*," to whisper further: "I'm afraid we can't ask you for a week or two, because of its being Lent. Mr. Legrand is so particular. He wouldn't have agreed to our coming to-night only that it's such a chance for Esther."

Not to lose the pathetic cadences of the phrase, "*Ses yeux se remplissaient de larmes*," sung in that haunting virginal voice, he nodded again, though he began to feel some discomfort. It was not till Plançon offered his arm to Mademoiselle Bauermeister, the Dame Marthe of the piece, that Mrs. Legrand continued, always in a whisper:

"The Tuesday after Easter would suit us—if you have no other engagement."

His eyes followed the action on the stage while he leaned sidewise down toward her and said, "That wouldn't do, because it's the day of the wedding."

"What wedding?" she gasped, in astonished questioning.

He allowed Plançon to stride across the full width of the stage, with little Bauermeister clinging to his arm and pattering beside him, before he found voice to say, "Hasn't Mr. Legrand told you?"

Heads were turned in the row in front, and there was a movement of disapproval in the stalls around them, so that the exchange of confidences came temporarily to an end. Once more his spiritual antennæ found themselves in play, and while he was glad of the respite for himself, he was conscious during the

whole of the scene in which Marguerite dons her jewels, and makes ready for her downfall, of the agonized curiosity of the poor little woman by his side. Happily, like Esther, he was still young and ardent enough to have little place in his mind for anything but what was passing on the stage. He was thinking of Hilda and his own romance all through the rapturous, languorous duet in which the two most moving voices of the age melted together in an almost unbearable love-sweetness. His consciousness of Mrs. Legrand's distress was like the dull aching of a nerve in the midst of entrancing preoccupations. He could mentally postpone feeling it till he couldn't do anything else.

That minute came with the falling of the curtain on the second act. Like the rattle of tiny artillery the applause swept the house from the stalls to the topmost gallery. There was no indiscretion in speaking, for Esther sat rapt, her eyes on the curtain, as though she had seen a vision that at any minute might reappear.

"Are you going to be married?"

There was an imperious ring in the question. It made him feel that if he were Mrs. Legrand herself would be wronged.

"I thought Mr. Legrand would tell you," he said, nervously.

"He never tells me anything; don't you know he doesn't?" Then peremptorily, after a pause: "Who is it to?"

As best he could in such a secret, whispered conference he gave the facts. There was no time to do more, for when the singers had ceased to pass and repass before the curtain Esther turned to say,

with glowing face, across their host: "Oh, mother, isn't it wonderful? Isn't it *enchanting?*"

No more was said of the young man's private affairs until the last curtain had gone down and they were putting on their wraps to go home. He was holding Mrs. Legrand's cloak for her convenience in slipping it on when she said in a low voice, over her shoulder: "Don't tell *her*. Leave me to do that."

He nodded as though he understood, but as a matter of fact he didn't understand at all. He was bewildered, unhappy. He felt guilty again, with the unaccountable sense of guilt that had beset him for the last four days, and which he had only just succeeded in getting rid of.

"Well, who wouldn't?" was Sophy's unsympathetic remark, when he had confided the whole affair to her. "I should think you'd be ashamed of yourself—all round."

Sophy and her husband had come from Ottawa, "to do the theaters," and incidentally take in the wedding. As the Honorable Mrs. Francis Colet, Sophy was distinctly the Englishwoman now, speaking, dressing, and wearing her hair, all in the character. With the high coiffure affected by the lady who two years later was to become Queen Alexandra, her little face, with its big eyes and big mouth, would have been top-heavy had not marriage given her figure a general expansion. Being the mother of a fine boy, who, if enough people died, would some day be an earl, she had gained in dignity, too; so that when she delivered her opinion to Charlie Grace she spoke as one with authority.

They were seated in that long corridor of the

Waldorf Hotel to which, in the nineties, people from the West and the South and New England came to wear their fine clothes and look at each other and fancy they were seeing New York. Charlie Grace himself was not yet so sophisticated as to be free from this delusion, though Sophy, with English hauteur, looked on with detachment, as ladies with Nebraskan or Californian faces and Parisian frocks gathered in groups or strolled up and down, enjoying the daring publicity.

"I can't see that," Charlie Grace protested. "I haven't done anything—"

"You've done enough to make Hilda break her engagement—if she treated you as you deserve. I should like to see Frank Colet taking girls and their mothers to dinner at the Blitz—and the opera afterward—without *me*."

"That's another thing. Frank Colet is married—"

"And you're *more* than married. You're *engaged*. Don't you see that?"

He pursed up his mouth, after a fashion he had. "H'm! I can't say that I do. Perhaps it's too subtle—"

"It's only too subtle because you're a goose. There are ways in which an engaged man has to be more careful than a married one. If you were married you might—at a pinch—only at a *pinch*, mind you—do this very same thing—and it wouldn't be misunderstood. I don't advise you to do it; but if you did, you could only get into trouble on one side. Now you're in trouble on both sides, and you richly deserve it."

He was silent a minute, lost in reflection. "You

talk as if marriage were a sort of signing one's soul away—" he began, slowly.

"So it is—for a man—almost. For a woman it's different. Marriage is an extension of a woman's privileges; but for a man it's a curtailment of his. It has to be that way."

"But suppose the man says it hasn't?"

"Oh, it doesn't matter what you *say*. It just—is. It would work that way even if you signed a paper beforehand that it shouldn't. It's nature; and if I were you, Charlie—"

"Yes? If you were me?"

"Well, I was only going to say—some one *ought* to say it, and it might as well be me—I was only going to say that if I were you I should give up that way of talking to every woman you meet as if you were in love with her. It doesn't do you any good, and it's misleading to her. The world is full of women who just want the slightest excuse to think that men are in love with them, and you're the type that makes them such geese."

"Will you kindly tell me what way you mean?"

"There! I mean that. I mean looking at me with pitiful eyes, as if I'd hurt you—and leaning toward me as if you expected me to stroke your hair—and speaking plaintively and timidly, like a naughty boy who's up to mischief. If I weren't your aunt, or your niece, or whatever it is—I never *can* remember whether you're my uncle, or I'm your aunt—but, now that I come to think of it, you're my uncle—well, if you weren't my uncle, you'd almost make me feel at times as if you were in love with me. Fortunately, I'm not a goose, and so I should see through you, even if we weren't related at all. But

all women are not like me—and Hilda isn't. She's sensitive. She'll be all the more sensitive because she's older than you are—"

He moved impatiently. "That's got nothing to do with it," he said, shortly. "The question of age doesn't affect either of us."

"It doesn't affect her perhaps so much as you. When a man chooses—chooses, mind you—to marry a woman older than himself, he's got to be doubly tender with her to make her feel sure he doesn't regret it. I don't say he's more likely to regret it than he would be if she was younger—only she'll think he is. If I were older than Frank I shouldn't let him out of my sight for an hour. I hardly do, as it is—"

"You begin to make me sorry for Frank."

"Well, I don't begin to make Frank sorry for himself; and if at the end of two years of marriage you can say the same, Charlie— But here's Frank, with the tickets. Let's see if they're for 'Zaza' or 'Lord and Lady Algy.'"

Acting on hints in the foregoing conversation, Charlie Grace was specially considerate of Hilda during the two weeks that still had to intervene before the day of the wedding. That is to say, he forbore to go back to the rectory in Vandiver Place, or to mention again the name of Esther Legrand. In his heart of hearts he thought such reserves a mistake. It gave importance to a thing of no moment, and conveyed the impression of its being a topic too fragile to be aired. He yielded against his better judgment only because Sophy's kittenlike face had grown so wise and her words so imperative. He would have been glad if Hilda had begun on the subject, but beyond the hope that he had had a

pleasant evening at the opera she had said nothing. He regretted this the more because of seeing, by the processes of supersensuous perception he had so suddenly developed, that she had not dismissed the matter from her mind.

Through Holy Week he saw relatively little of her on account of her diligence in attending services. On the morning of Easter day he accompanied her to one of the larger churches in the neighborhood of Fifth Avenue. She had not asked him to do this, but he knew his coming would please her. And yet, by a natural chain of associations, the service carried his mind to persistent thinking of Esther Legrand. As, in his musical bass, he joined in the familiar hymns, "The strife is o'er, the battle done" and "Jesus Christ is risen to-day," his thoughts traveled back to the time when he had piped them in his boyish treble in the choir of St. David's. It was inevitable that present conditions at St. David's should then present themselves and that he should begin thinking with distress of his caddishness in not having gone again to see the Legrands. It was as if he had accepted Mrs. Legrand's implication that his presence might be a danger to Esther. He knew it was nothing of the kind. He knew that Mrs. Legrand herself didn't think so. And yet if he had gone, there would have been a renewal of complications with Hilda. To a man unaccustomed to subtleties the situation was perplexing. For Hilda's sake he must seem to drop the Legrands and submit to their considering him a boor. He must certainly do that till after he was married, when, according to Sophy's dicta, there would be less necessity for being careful. But the day of his marriage would also

be the day of his leaving New York, so that atonement was cut off in that direction also. He could only resolve that if ever he returned he would do what he could to make amends.

The service produced no impression on him at all, unless it was to confirm him in his wisdom in never attending church. It was restless, noisy, pretentious, over-elaborate. A remarkably well-dressed assembly of gentlemen and ladies seemed to have deputed their devotions entirely to some forty men and boys, who, as he knew from his own past experience, had for the most part neither knowledge of what they were doing nor heart in it, except in so far as they were paid. He took them as being on precisely the same footing as the chorus at the opera, and not so entertaining. The lessons were read in the untrained, unintelligible manner which in churches is apparently held good enough for the Word of God, though the sermon he called excellent unreservedly.

"If they'd only clear out the choir," he said to Hilda, as amid the Easter throng they walked down Fifth Avenue in the direction of the cross-street where the Merediths lived, "and have something simple and sincere like the sermon, I might go again."

She raised her eyes to his, timidly, mistily. "Charlie, by this time next week we shall be married."

"Yes, darling, thank God."

"You say that so fervently that you make me believe you. And yet I wonder—"

"You wonder," he broke in, with a laugh, "if I mightn't do better to marry some one else."

"Some one younger. I do think it a risk, Charlie—both on your part and mine."

He slipped his arm through hers, drawing her toward him. "All marriage is a risk, darling. But when a man adores his wife as I adore you, don't you think the risk is minimized?"

She looked up at him and smiled through tears. "I must believe that," she said, with conviction. "I *must.*"

Two days later Charlie Grace stood in the old schoolroom of St. David's listening to Remnant.

"I kind o' thought you'd ha' had the choir and a swell weddin', Mr. Charlie. It don't seem right for you to be married in a hole and corner way like this. I don't believe your pa would ha' liked it, nor your poor ma. Your pa especially was a great one for having things done stylish. There was nothing he liked better than one of them great rich weddings, with people climbing over the backs of the pews to look at the bride, and the quartette singing up in the old gallery to beat the band, and all New York, as you might say, assembled in old St. David's. He'd swell up then, and look as grand as if he was being married himself. They don't have 'em nowadays. Marriage ain't what it used to be. If it had been I might ha' been tempted to it myself. But as soon as I'd begun to think of it I could see it was going down. It' ll be out altogether one of these days—with all this divorcin'. I guess there's about two divorces nowadays to every marriage, and pretty soon it 'll be *all* divorces. Well, that's one thing we don't have at St. David's, anyhow. Parson Legrand is dead again' it. He'll marry, but he'll not divorce—and that's pretty near the only point where I agree with him."

Charlie Grace cast his eyes round the old room,

with its worn cocoanut matting and dingy walls. "How would you like to have a brand-new parish house, Remnant, with everything spruce and convenient for your cooking-classes and sewing-bees and all the rest of it?"

Remnant threw up his hands with a despairing gesture. "That's one thing, Mr. Charlie, as I pray the Lord 'll spare us. God knows we've got riff-raff enough now; but it 'u'd be all riffraff if we had one o' them things. I've seen 'em. I've been in 'em. They'll draw a low crowd quicker than a fat man 'll tempt mosquitoes. It 'll be boys' clubs, and girls' clubs, and teas for old women, and this one learning that thing, and that one learning another thing, till we'll be drove right off our nut. And it 'll all come on me, Mr. Charlie. I'll have to spend the rest of my life cleanin' up after them as I'd like to clean off the face of the earth once for all. Not but what I'd have the time, for I don't hardly take no pains with the church nowadays. What 'u'd be the good—with the low crowd that comes here? It was different in the old days, when Mrs. Hornblower 'u'd be as partic'lar about her pew as if she meant to strip and go to bed in it. Ah, she was a lady for you! Nothin' like her nowadays! They don't make 'em, Mr. Charlie. Not but what you may have got one of the same breed yourself. I'm sure I hope you have, if there's any of that kind left alive, which I don't hardly think there is. Well, I'll just slip down to the door to see if the bride is coming. I'll let you know, Mr. Charlie; you needn't fret. You just stay here quiet till I give you the word. Then you'll go out and stand at the foot of the chancel steps till Miss Emma's husband brings

her up to you. You've got the ring in your waistcoat pocket, haven't you? That's all right then. You should ha' had a best man to attend to that, Mr. Charlie. But don't fret. I'll see you through. And I'll have your hat and gloves and overcoat down at the main door, so that you won't have to worry about nothin' after you've give the bride your arm. And you're sure you don't want the bells rung? It 'u'd be a pleasure to do it for you, Mr. Charlie; and it 'u'd seem more proper like. Ah, well! Just as you say. People don't get married nowadays like what they used to."

Five minutes later Charlie Grace stood at the chancel steps, where Rufus Legrand, in surplice and stole, with prayer-book open, had already taken his place. The young man felt oddly apathetic. Consciously or subconsciously he had had this moment in view for nearly twelve years, but now that it had come it found him without emotion. Before Hilda appeared on Osborne's arm in the doorway at the end of the aisle there were still a few minutes, during which his eye roved idly over the little gathering of friends. In the front pew, on the right, Emma, Sophy, and Frank sat together. In the corresponding seat on the other side were Mr. and Miss Purvis, with two or three men with whom he was on easy terms in the New York office of the Trans-Canadian. Behind them, in the pew she had been wont to occupy in former years, was Mrs. Furnival, richly dressed as usual, but showing at last, and all of a sudden, the ravages of time. Beside her was Freddy, stout, spectacled, and serious, already making a reputation for himself among the physicians of New York. Directly behind Emma and her

family came the ladies Meredith, the mother and three daughters, while behind them again, in the place that had been hers for fifty years and her mother's before her—old, purblind, looking as if her clothes were dangerously near slipping from her person—was Miss Smedley, accompanied by a trained nurse. Far back in the church, an unbidden spectator of the ceremony, he could see Esther Legrand. Mrs. Legrand wasn't there.

He was not nervous. He was, in fact, more self-possessed than he felt he had a right to be. After making an effort to capture the sentiment he deemed fitting to the moment, he could do no more than recall the day when he had found Remnant, on the very spot where he himself was now standing, dusting the trestles on which was presently to repose the body of old Mrs. Badger. Even when the doors opened at the end of the nave, and Osborne and Hilda began to come slowly up the aisle, he could think of nothing but the fact that Osborne was better looking since he had grown a beard, which concealed his bulldog chin, and that Hilda's traveling-dress of terra-cotta brown, with cuffs and a sort of waistcoat of dark green, was entirely to his taste. He could scarcely see her features, partly because she walked with head slightly bowed, and partly because her face was shaded by a large, black-plumed hat.

Nevertheless, he was aware of a sudden thrill when Rufus Legrand's voice began solemnly:

"'Dearly beloved, we are gathered together here, in the sight of God, and in the face of this company, to join together this Man and this Woman in holy Matrimony.'"

There was something primal in this, something that came down to the facts without blinking them. So, too, when the same voice, lowered till it became awesome, addressed itself personally to them:

"'I require and charge you both, as ye will answer at the dreadful day of judgment when the secrets of all hearts shall be disclosed, that if either of you know any impediment why ye may not be lawfully joined together in matrimony, ye do now confess it.'"

To the best of Charlie Grace's belief there was no such impediment, and yet during the pause in which Rufus Legrand seemed to look expectantly about the church, as if waiting for some one to forbid the ceremony, he had a foolish sinking of the heart. It was a relief when no interruption came, and the solemn voice went on. It was the more solemn in using the unaccustomed baptismal names, which seemed to isolate the Man and the Woman from the world and all its conventions, like a new Adam and a new Eve, at the beginning of a new creation.

"Charles Gunnison, wilt thou have this Woman to thy wedded wife . . . ?"

"Hilda Mary Antonia, wilt thou have this Man to thy wedded husband. . . ?"

"I, Charles Gunnison, take thee, Hilda Mary Antonia, to my wedded wife, to have and to hold from this day forward . . . ."

"I, Hilda Mary Antonia, take thee, Charles Gunnison, to my wedded husband, to have and to hold from this day forward. . . ."

When, after the bestowal of the ring, the Man and the Woman followed the priest to the altar rail, and, kneeling side by side, repeated together the Lord's

Prayer, Charlie Grace found at last the emotion he had been in search of.

In the west porch, when all was over, there was a confusion of congratulations, kissing, crying, and shaking hands. The bridegroom had not been really nervous till then. He made now the traditional mistakes of almost embracing old Mr. Purvis, while saluting Emma with a handshake, creating the traditional amusement. He was obliged, moreover, to submit to Remnant's ministrations in the matter of overcoat, hat, and gloves. What perturbed him more, perhaps, than anything else was the sight of Esther Legrand standing against the small door that led to the old organ loft—a little aloof—looking at the party with the timid smile of the child who has not been invited to join it. It was purely accidental that she had this appealing pose, this wistful air of exclusion, while her coloring was no more beautiful than it was at any other time; but something in the reunion of qualities smote Charlie Grace to the heart. If it had been possible he would have caught her in his arms as he would have caught a lonely child. As it was he could only approach her circumspectly, shaking hands, thanking her incoherently for her kind wishes, and bidding her good-by.

They were already in the carriage, and Remnant was closing the door with a "God bless you, Mr. Charlie; God bless the young lady, too," and a pathetic expression in the bleared old eyes, when Esther Legrand appeared impulsively. Her face glowed and her violet eyes grew liquid as Charlie Grace had seen them once or twice before. She stretched out her hand to Hilda.

"Oh, I know you'll be happy, Mrs. Grace. You've married the kindest man in the world."

As they turned to drive up Vandiver Place Charlie Grace lifted his wife's veil and kissed her. For a long time neither of them spoke. It was Hilda who broke the silence first.

"She *is* beautiful—that girl—more so than you said."

He answered, simply: "Yes, she is. And I think she's a good girl, too."

"I'm sure of it."

There was another long silence as they sat hand in hand, driving up the long straight line of Madison Avenue toward the station. They had almost reached their goal when Hilda laid her cheek against his shoulder.

"Charlie, dear, I'm so happy that I'm afraid. Are you quite, quite sure that you shouldn't have married—some one younger?"

CHAPTER VII

ONCE she was seated in her stateroom in the train, Hilda recovered her spirits. She did more; she became vivacious. American methods of travel being relatively new to her, she took much interest in the details of her personal surroundings and the departure from New York. Almost for the first time since he had known her Charlie Grace found her light-hearted. There was nothing excited in her manner, nor febrile. She was simply at ease in her new situation—more so than he.

That fact was borne in on him as the train rattled northward through the wistful spring twilight, and he looked out at a windy sunset, all of dull orange barred with black. He was married! He was proud; he was happy; and yet he was—married. He began to understand that something had happened to him. He had started out with the radiant young lady opposite to travel, first to Montreal, then to Winnipeg, then to the Pacific coast—and then always. He wondered whether he had ever done justice to this last aspect of the married state. Was it possible that he had viewed matrimony hitherto chiefly as an episode? Life as he had known it had been all episodes—brief, intense periods, each one of which had come to an end, to be followed by something equally intense, but equally fleeting. He was prepared to admit that in these various

situations, whether of love or labor, the fleeting element had been the best. The knowledge that he would soon be up and off again gave zest to each moment of seeming repose. And now it was possible —barely possible—that he might never be up and off any more.

He was proud; he was happy; he made not the slightest question of that; but he was surprised. He was surprised at the subtle change in Hilda's manner; he was surprised at her matter-of-course acceptance of the conditions which the ceremony of the afternoon had imposed on them. It was almost as if she found marriage—natural; as if she took the prospect of a lifelong intimate companionship without dismay. True, she had no wild freedoms, no cherished secrecies, no happy-go-lucky vagabondages to give up. She had always been answerable to another person, and would doubtless find a life without restrictions as formidable as a canary bird a life without a cage. He began to perceive—or to think he perceived—that her happiness lay not in the fact that she had got out of the cage, but that some one else had got in. There was a minute, a swiftly passing minute, of alarm lest marriage should prove not a co-operation but a captivity.

It was a swiftly passing minute because she made it so. If she took possession of him it was with a gentle, winning grace that made service the highest kind of privilege. When he pulled her dressing-bag from the rack overhead, as he had to do a good many times during the first three hours of married life, now for a book, now for a cushion, now for a bottle of cologne, the smile with which she rewarded him was more than compensation for the nuisance

he secretly felt it to be lifting the confounded thing up and down. It was the sort of service to which he was willing to vow himself in bondage. He was eager to fetch and carry and be her slave in all material things if only in the inner life, in certain personal elements, non-essential to married happiness as he conceived of it, she would leave him free.

And yet, oddly enough, from the minute when practical life began next day at Montreal the desire for freedom left him. There was nothing for which he wanted liberty. On the contrary, such liberty as he had became a bore. He had certain meetings to attend, certain men to see on business, a certain time to spend each day in the offices of the Trans-Canadian. When these duties were ended he was but too anxious to return to his wife. It was so at Winnipeg; it was so at Forde; it was so at Queen Charlotte. It was so when private interests, his own and Osborne's, took him to Seattle, San Francisco, and Los Angeles. He had never dreamed that there could be so delightful, so intelligent a traveling companion. Her knowledge of European countries enabled her to appraise the beauties of American scenery better than he could himself. All sorts of places that he had looked at hitherto with unseeing eyes became vivid, significant, in the light of her power of comparison. Her power of comparison made it possible for her not only to appreciate but to differentiate, to get relative values. A prairie-town in Alberta, a logging-camp in Washington, an orange orchard in California, became to her not mere isolated objects of interest, representing so much investment or such and such earning capacity, as they had always been to him, but assets toward the

welfare of the race. Vast tracts unsettled, untilled, or uncleared were a perpetual joy to her. "All this for the poor old overcrowded human race still to come and occupy!" she would exclaim. There was nothing so simple that she couldn't enjoy it or so rough and crude that she couldn't take it with a smile. She had all the advantages that belong so conspicuously to an older civilization when it comes into sympathetic contact with a new one.

She maintained, for example, an extraordinary interest throughout the journey over the desert from Los Angeles to Salt Lake City. While other passengers were groaning with the heat, divesting themselves of articles of clothing with a marvelous *sans-gêne*, she sat cool, alert, fascinated by the ever-changing spectacle. Through windows hermetically sealed a fine sand sifted in, covering everything with a coating of dust and filling the eyes and lungs. Outside, queer, spiny things twisted themselves painfully out of the arid, thirsty soil. Cacti, grotesquely human, stood like sentinels, like scarecrows, like ghosts, or like things long ago crucified and still hanging on their time-battered crosses. On entering Utah the country became red, blistered, sore, like a land suffering from some strange earth-plague. It had none of the awesome fascination of the California desert; it lay twisted, writhing, agonized. She talked of Brigham Young, of the heroism of the early followers of the prophet Smith, who dragged themselves over this joyless tract to force it into fertility. As fertility began she watched for the scrubby farms, and the tall, sad Lombardy poplars reminding her distantly of France. At the stations she studied the men and women, especially the women, who passed

up and down the platforms—faded, jaded, fanatical —embodying the qualities of the seared and salted soil. In the city she was intent on seeing the Lion House, the Beehive House, the Amelia Palace—homes of women who had apparently been content each with a shred of a man's love, while other women took the rest. She speculated as to how far they had *been* content—as to the heart-aches and furies and rebellions that must have been sheltered behind these quiet walls. He saw it was the women who interested her particularly. She scrutinized them in the streets; she made pretexts for going into Deseret shops, Deseret banks, Deseret bookstores—always with an eye to the women, to their faces, to their clothes, to the indefinable betrayals through which one woman delivers up her secrets to another. He began to understand this singular preoccupation when they were at dinner in the hotel one night.

"Charlie, how *can* a woman share her husband with anybody else?"

Oddly enough, the question surprised him into a feeling of self-consciousness. He had an idea that he colored. He took a sip of wine. "I'm sure I don't know," he said, lamely. Then, slightly ashamed of a weakness that might be prejudicial to his own interests, he added: "Of course, one has to remember that women are not like men. A woman's sympathies are naturally concentrated, while a man's—"

He paused, searching for a word. She had ceased to eat. On the other side of the table she sat erect, with the fire in her eyes that reminded him of the ruby light in amber.

"Yes, Charlie?" she smiled. "A man's are—what? Go on."

"Well, a man's are likely to be—a little—scattered."

She weighed his words before she spoke. "If I thought you really believed that," she laughed, "I could find it in my heart to—to kill you. And the worst of it is, I think you do believe it."

He was absurdly embarrassed, but he too laughed. "Oh, you needn't be personal. I wasn't thinking of myself, but of men in general."

"It seems to me," she said, taking up her knife and fork again, "that you're very much a man in general."

"But you're not a woman in general," he had the wit to reply, "so that we're likely to get along."

"Does that mean that it will be my part to—to make the concessions? Because if it does . . . Do you remember my saying once that I could be dangerous?"

He was uncomfortable. "I remember your talking nonsense. By the way, suppose we go out to the Salt Lake to-morrow. In all the times I've been here I've never seen it."

She accepted the diversion, and on the following afternoon they made the excursion.

Carried by the train to the end of a pier jutting out a half-mile from the shore, they found themselves in a pavilion which seemed to them a dream-like distortion of the Pavillon de la Jetée at Nice. Brass-bands were playing; crowds were promenading; a restaurant, a scenic railway, a Choy Chamber, a Skee Ball, a Gee Whiz Whirl, a Crystal Maze, a kiddies' corner, a dancing-hall, and a photographer's

saloon were all in operation. In swimming-pools, inclosed by miniature docks and rows of dressing-rooms, men and women, boys and girls, were sporting in the shallow, buoyant water, or sunning themselves in bathing-costumes along the tiny quays.

Charlie Grace would have beaten a retreat to the city by the return train; but Hilda preferred to linger. It was the sort of gathering as to which she was frankly curious. Owing to her European life, she had little in the way of American distaste for the masses. The scenic railway and the Crystal Maze were tolerably familiar; but she was interested to learn the nature of a Choy Chamber, a Skee Ball, and a Gee Whiz Whirl. Having investigated these mysteries, they wandered to a belvedere at the most distant point of the long, lightly constructed jetty, and, turning their backs on the confused murmur of the crowds, could sit looking out at the immense polished mirror of the lake, above which gulls swooped and circled with plaintive cries.

The lake was a polished mirror barely dulled by the salty evaporations in the air. With the late afternoon sun upon it the glare would have been painful to the eyes had it not been for this gentle blur, and the relief of jagged rocky islets lifting themselves boldly, like Ischia or Capri. Except for their solid masses of earth-brown and the fire of the sun, everything was of shimmering silver.

It was the air that caught color first. "Oh, look!" Hilda cried, clutching her husband's sleeve.

High above the lake there was all at once a quiver of green, like the green flash of a flitting hummingbird. It was a flash and no more at first, till, by dint of sheer looking, it became steadied, permanent,

descending with a tremor of the eyelids to the bosom of the lake, where the silver mirror became a jewel of pale chrysoprasus. In the same instant the jagged islet on the right was of burnished copper, with reflections of ruby and dull gold. That on the left was a tremulous blue, with the blue not of cloud but of gleaming enamel. The central islet, and most distant of the three, was curiously changeable —now shining like a rose-quartz, now burning like a topaz, now darkening to obsidian bottle-green, and now lying dim and lusterless like an agate. Out of an amethystine haze deep purple mountains emerged on the farther shore, receding again into a purple deeper still as the sun came lower, and the pale, green surface of the water began to reflect shades of flame. In the sky itself, below the fluctuating azure of the zenith, all was dusky beaten gold, except where a few bars of horizontal cloud gave forth hues—indigo, emerald, violet—of metals unknown to earthly alchemists. Everywhere the sheen was metallic, gemlike—the beauty of a world that, knowing neither tree nor flower, draws its resources from the primal, structural elements of the universe.

In the midst of this pageantry it was possible to close the mind against the bray of the brass-bands and the shrieking of the Gee Whiz Whirl. Charlie and Hilda Grace were long silent. It was enough to sit and gaze at a spectacle that transcended expression and made comment futile. Doubtless, it was the wonder of it all, mingling with and interpenetrating her happiness, that caused Hilda to say, at last, on one of the deepest and softest of her alto notes:

"Charlie, dear—I've been meaning to tell you. . . . One of these days we must have a home."

He answered absently, his head to one side, while his eye tried to seize in the air an interplay of colors more subtly iridescent than those in doves' necks: "Yes, dear; in New York. I know of a chap who's building to sell—"

"I'm afraid it will have to be before that."

He looked at her. "Can't we stick it out—?"

She shook her head. "No, Charlie dear; and I shall have to have Emma, or Sophy, or Mrs. Meredith—or *some one*—to stay with me for a while."

He looked at her more sharply, his fair, irregular eyebrows drawn into a questioning frown. He had a moment of alarm. "You don't mean—" he began, slowly.

She nodded. "Yes, Charlie, dear."

"Good Lord!" he said, under his breath.

His exclamation was one of surprise, not of impatience, but it caused her to turn to him quickly. "Aren't you glad? Oh, say you're glad, Charlie, dear."

He took his time. "I suppose I *shall* be glad—"

"Oh, but aren't you glad now?"

"Well, it's a little sudden, you know—"

"I don't see how you can call it sudden when we've been married four months."

"I mean the thought is sudden—"

"Why, haven't you *been* thinking of it?"

He looked confused. "Of course I know such things happen; but I've thought of them chiefly as happening to other people—"

"And now they're going to happen to us! Oh, Charlie, you can't imagine how happy it makes me.

. . . I was going to tell you before, but somehow I couldn't . . . till now this wonderful afternoon seems to have taken us up into its own heaven. It seems the minute to tell you . . . when everything is so transfigured. . . . It isn't possible, though, to make you understand how marvelous it seems to me after my forlorn, lonely years. . . . You were right that evening when you said I was lonely and forlorn. . . . I was proud, too . . . and shy . . . and frightened . . . I was afraid of happiness . . . I fought against it . . . I fought against you, Charlie, . . . I sent you away . . . I said I didn't believe in you . . . but that was only partially true. . . . And now it seems to me . . . don't be shocked . . . I'm not saying it irreverently . . . but it seems to me as though some extraordinary annunciation had been made to me . . . as was made to Mary . . . and as if I were singing a 'Magnificat.'"

He got up and walked to the railing of the belvedere, where he stood looking out over the lake. He was not thinking now of its wonders as a transformation scene. His mind was working hard in other ways. The thought of being a father came to him distinctly as a shock. It was something he had not included in his outlook, not in his immediate outlook, certainly. If he had any anticipation of it at all it was for later, when he should be older, with the roving years behind him. It was a still greater shock, an immeasurably greater shock, to associate Hilda with the prospect of maternity. That had in it some of the sharpness of a blow. It was impious, destructive. It was a desecration of her daintiness, of her perfectness as exquisite woman of the world.

It was like taking something rare and precious to put it to gross utilitarian purposes.

That was, however, beside the immediate mark. If the thing was to happen it meant the end of the delicious wandering idyl that he had planned to go on for some months to come. They must take to cover somewhere, as hatching insects take to earth.

When he turned, all the colors of the water and the firmament seemed to be reflected in her eyes. As she sat with hands lying idly in her lap and her gaze fixed on the stupendous, ever-transmuting vision of the west, she was like a creature bathed in radiance and rainbows. Even he couldn't help thinking of Mary—as she might have sat after the angel had gone away. He went to her. He would have kissed her had he dared to disturb her reverie. When he spoke, his words sounded woefully commonplace in his own ears, though the smile with which she listened seemed to show that there was a music in them to hers.

"Look here, darling. We're on our way to Minnesaba, where Osborne wants me to look after some iron interests of his—and mine—and this may keep me a considerable time. Osborne has a house there—empty—except for the caretakers. Why shouldn't I arrange to make it my headquarters for a year or so? I know I could—now that for the time being I'm not on any one job in particular for the T.-C. R."

And so it happened that they settled temporarily at Minnesaba. Then began for Charlie Grace another long period of happiness. Being domestic happiness, it had the charm of novelty. With a home of his own, a wife of his own, and a baby coming, he began to feel his value as a citizen, as a man. He took his

place in the procession of the human race. He ceased to be, to his own consciousness, a mere sporadic existence, rootless, unattached, irresponsible, on the waste of time. He fitted into the scheme of things, as descendant, as ancestor, as recipient and transmitter of the great human heirlooms. In the offices he frequented, at the Club, and in other reunions of responsible men, he began to feel the importance that is not self-importance which comes to younger men on being admitted to the council of the elders. It was so far so good.

CHAPTER VIII

IT was the season of the asters, dahlias, and zinnias when Hilda came to Minnesaba. They ran in two straight flaming lines, on either side of the lawn, down the whole slope of the hill on which the house was perched, till they seemed to run into the cold, flashing waters of Lake Superior. In the coppice at the back of the house the thimbleberry was ripe, and here and there a maple leaf was as red as a poinsettia.

It seemed to her husband that she came there with a touching sense of relief. It was not that she was physically tired so much as that she was emotionally craving for a home. It was the first time since her childhood that she had had one. The domestic was to her even more a novelty than to him. She took delight in everything, from engaging servants to ordering the meals and rearranging the furniture. When there was nothing else to do she would sit for hours on the veranda facing the lake, idle, contented, contemplative, with the rapt look of one who is listening to the *Magnificat anima mea Dominum* singing itself in her heart.

It was her first experience of American life outside of New York, and she enjoyed it. She enjoyed the neighborliness, the friendliness, the kindly care for her in the somewhat lonely position, that seemed to come spontaneously out of the hearts of a community. She grew speedily to understand that there

were at least a dozen good motherly women yearning over her as if she were a daughter, and she liked it. After the well-meaning frigidities of European life it was an odd sensation, this of being the object of a sort of communal kindness not afraid of being demonstrative. She could lie back on it, rest on it, smile in its eyes, and sometimes cry on its bosom. She loved the people; she loved the place; and she loved the house at the head of the green lawn above the lake; she loved the lake itself—cold, silvery, virginal—over whose waters she could still see coming ghostly the canoes of Père Marquette and Jean Greysolon du Luth.

The brief northern summer passed into the glorious northern autumn, and autumn became November. Mists came up from the lake, shrouding the spires and grain-elevators and high office-buildings of the town, while on the bare crest of hills at the back of the city there was sometimes a little snow. Hilda began to live indoors. Charlie Grace found himself wishing, perhaps with a touch of impatience, that "the whole business was over." It was a distinct break in the monotony when an offer for certain properties held by Osborne and himself in the iron districts of the Mesaba Range called him to New York. Fortunately, Hilda was cheerful and well, and she already numbered so many women friends in Minnesaba that he could safely leave her with them for a week or two. Besides, it would be good policy for him to appear occasionally in New York, so that his claims as Mr. Purvis's adjutant or successor should not be overlooked. Since he had disabled Ellis, who, with Sir William Short's backing, seemed at one time likely to get the place, he had little fear

of rivalry; but it did no harm to show himself as often as possible in lower Broadway.

His reasoning was so sensible, and a trip of the kind so much a matter of course, that he was astounded to see Hilda overcome by dismay at the mention of his going. He had come into her room on his return in the evening for dinner. She had already dressed, in a loosely fitting robe like a tea-gown, and was lying down. He told her what he meant to do, immediately after he had kissed her.

She raised herself suddenly, with a look of terror. "You're going away—like that?"

"Only for ten days, darling—or a fortnight at longest."

"A fortnight?—a whole fortnight?"

"Or ten days, darling—perhaps not more than a week."

"And I'm to be left here?"

"I don't see what else we can do, dearest. Since you can't travel—"

She rose to a sitting posture, her feet on the rug beside her couch. "Since I can't travel—I can be left anywhere. I suppose that's it. It's very convenient, isn't it?—for you."

He backed away from the couch and sat down. "It isn't convenient for me, Hilda, but there are times when we have to accept inconveniences—and put up with them."

She looked at him steadily. "Charlie, you can't go. Don't you see you can't go?"

"But I *must* go. Osborne is counting on me. It means money—a great deal of money—"

"And I mean more than money—or at least I suppose I do. Perhaps in that, however, I'm mistaken—"

"Don't be foolish, darling. Can't you see? I'm not going for long. I'm obliged to go away sometimes. With our big interests all over the country—"

She rose and walked across the room. "Very well, Charlie. If you go I must go, too."

"But how *can* you go—this time?"

"I shall manage it. I shall manage it perfectly well."

He, too, got up, and walked the length of the room. "In that case, come. I shall be only too glad to have you with me. I only supposed that in your present condition—"

She could only repeat: "If you go I must go. There's no more to be said."

"Oh, very well, then. The thing is settled so far as I'm concerned. You're coming with me; and I'm—I'm delighted. I think that now I had better go and dress."

During dinner she sat with eyelids dropped and the frozen manner that reminded him of the years of their early acquaintance. He had again the sensation, from which he had been free of late, of her withdrawal into remote regions, leaving him to feel guilty, brutal. It was only when they were alone at the end of the meal that he ventured to say:

"I think we had better go by the night train to Chicago on Wednesday next. You could probably take one of the maids with you—the one who looks after you up-stairs."

She made no response, nor did she look up at him. From his place across the table he watched her furtively. He noticed without sympathy now that which he had hitherto observed with tenderness, that

her state of health had turned her clear ivory color into sallowness, and that her features were pinched and worn. It was as if he had emerged suddenly out of a golden mist to see her in the light of a vivid, pitiless sun.

Later in the evening, as he sat smoking and reading the papers in Osborne's special snuggery, she came and knelt by the arm of his chair, laying her cheek against his sleeve. He continued to follow with his eyes the lines of the paper he held up before him, though he understood nothing of what he read. Presently he heard a little smothered sob. Dropping the paper, he slipped his arm about her.

"What is it, darling? What's the matter?"

"Charlie, I'm not going. I don't want to go. I want you to forgive me."

"But why should I forgive you, darling? What harm is there in wishing to come, so long as you can travel? I supposed you couldn't travel; and that's the only reason I thought of going without you."

She dried her eyes, but continued to speak brokenly. "There's nothing to keep me from traveling as yet; but that's not the point. It isn't that I want to go to New York. I abhor New York. I should be glad if I never had to see the city again. I'm never happy there. But it isn't even that. It's— I hardly know how to tell you. You'll laugh at me—and you'll be offended at the same time. But, Charlie, dear, it terrifies me to have you out of my sight."

He laughed, and pressed her more closely. "But since I *have* to be out of your sight at times wouldn't it be well—?"

"To get myself accustomed to it. Yes; I know.

That's what I mean to try to do. I *will* trust you, Charlie; I will."

His arm relaxed its pressure. "Oh, so that's it?" Then, after a pause, he added: "Well, you'd better come."

She withdrew herself slightly, lifting a tearful, expostulating face to his. "But why should you say that, when my object now is not to come? I want you to see—"

"That you put me on my honor. Thanks. But perhaps you can understand that one resents being put on one's honor before one's been *off* it, so to speak."

"I do understand that; and it's why I'm asking you to forgive me. I'm only too eager to feel that there isn't a cloud of suspicion between us."

"Then the easiest way to feel that is to come and see for yourself. Besides, since you *can* come, don't you know it's far pleasanter for me to have you with me? Since you *can* come, I insist on your coming. In fact, I shouldn't think of going without you."

And so, after more persuasion and final reconciliation, Hilda went to New York. In making her preparations she alternated between joy that he should insist on her company and shame at having forced herself upon him. There were times when the latter feeling was in the ascendant, and he was obliged to do the work of convincing her all over again. Because the question when once raised could only, with credit to himself, be settled in one way, he set himself to the task with greater patience and determination. The consciousness, too, that if she

suspected him he was not above suspicion was an element in his zeal. It was as much to persuade himself of his entire devotion as to persuade her that he allowed no deflection from the decision at which they had arrived.

As, in New York, Hilda was obliged to spend most of her time in her rooms at the hotel, Charlie Grace was conscientious in returning to her as soon as his duties permitted him. He went to no theaters, and except for lunching at the down-town clubs, declined all outings with friends. He did this in the hope that if Hilda saw there was nothing sinister in his life she would be more at ease with regard to him another time. That, in spite of all her efforts, she was not wholly at ease with regard to him now he could see by all sorts of trifles—glances, intonations, sentences begun and either suppressed or diverted—by which she betrayed herself. He began to fear that in a man like him for a nature like hers there would always be something to question. For this he was willing to take the responsibility on himself as far as he was able. If he reproached her at all, it was only when he caught glimpses on her part of involuntary, invincible distrust in moments when he was doing his utmost.

In spite of the assiduity of his marital attentions there came a day when Charlie Grace found himself unexpectedly free. With certain telegrams he had received from Osborne that morning his business was completed. He had conducted it so skilfully that Osborne and he would divide some seventy or eighty thousand dollars of profits between them. It was a day on which to be cheerful. His impulse was to go straight to his wife and tell her the pleasing

news. They could lunch together as — except on the two Sundays—they had not been able to do since their arrival, and he could take her to drive.

He remembered, however, that she was to drive with Mrs. Meredith, and that afterward the three Miss Merediths were coming to tea. He disliked the ladies Meredith, and he also disliked the tea scene in a tiny hotel sitting-room. It was too much like tea in a cabin on board ship.

It seemed obviously permissible, therefore, to go and lunch at the Blitz, treating himself handsomely and indulging in pleasant thoughts. He liked eating in restaurants, whether alone or in company. He liked this exercise especially in New York, where the surroundings added a cheerful glitter to good food, stirring the imagination, and sometimes titillating the lower senses, with their well-bred promiscuities. Holding himself superior to none of these forms of appeal, he avoided the comparative grayness of the men's café, and took his seat in the gay saloon he had last entered in the society of Miss Legrand.

Perhaps his thoughts occupied themselves first with Hattie Bright. They often did so. When there was nothing else to do, it interested him to follow the possible divagations of a career that had led from the shabby boarding-house to the luxury of the Blitz. The fact that he had never met her from the evening when she had confessed that there was nothing in the house to eat to that when he saw her richly dressed and wearing diamonds added piquancy to his speculations. He recalled with a smile his efforts to raise five hundred dollars on her

behalf, and his bitterness over his failure. He had not outlived that bitterness yet. Enough of his early training still lingered with him to recall the words: "If any man love not his brother whom he hath seen, how *can* he love God whom he hath not seen?" He recalled them now, with one of his periodical outbursts of scorn for the people of old St. David's, who could meet Sunday by Sunday to sing their praises, and yet leave one of their own number to starve, and her daughter to go to the devil. It was a savage satisfaction to think that if she *had* gone to the devil, at least she had gone clad in velvets, with jewels on her breast. One of these days, he said to himself, he should look her up. Since he was not sufficiently without sin to cast a stone at her, it would be nothing but the part of loyalty to an old friend to make some sign of life. Hilda wouldn't like it if she knew—but then it wasn't necessary that she should know.

There were already some things as to which he had not taken Hilda into his confidence, and among them was the possible memorial to his father in the shape of a St. David's parish-house. He had kept silent about it, not because he had abandoned the intention, but because he feared she would associate the idea with Esther Legrand. He himself did not, at least he assured himself that he did not. It must be evident to any one that Esther Legrand might marry, or that her father might resign St. David's and go elsewhere, long before the plan for this memorial could take shape. What he was looking for was something that could effectively and appropriately commemorate his father's name; and if Esther Legrand had some remote and en-

tirely non-essential connection with it he couldn't help it. Hilda would think, however, that he could help it; and so he had not been impelled to make her his confidante.

Since she was not his confidante, he reasoned, the present afternoon, when she was pleasantly occupied with her friends, might be as good an opportunity as any for him to look over the ground. He said to look over the ground, because he meant it. He wanted to see by actual measurement, in a general way, what space there was in the plot on which St. David's and its rectory stood for an additional building. His meeting with Esther Legrand was, therefore, incidental, even accidental, to this legitimate design.

Remnant not being on the spot, and neither Mr. nor Mrs. Legrand at home, he strolled about at his ease. For what he had in mind he saw that the only site was on that part of the grass-plot between the chancel and the drawing-room end of the rectory. This would necessitate the demolition, or inclusion, of the old schoolroom — a small Gothic brown-stone building, consisting of one good-sized room and a loft. It was possible that the accommodations it afforded might be utilized in the new construction. He slipped inside to see.

He had already heard the sound of children's voices, so that on entering he found the sort of scene he had expected. In the gathering dimness of the November afternoon some fifteen or twenty little girls, swarthy, black-eyed elfins for the most part, were seated round a table on which stood a basket containing the usual accessories for sewing. With little heads bent sagely they worked at what might

have been handkerchiefs, or dusters, or pinafores. Two or three of the older ones were in a group by themselves. From a remote resemblance of the articles taking shape under their fingers to human legs and arms, they appeared to be modeling some elementary form of garment—probably for the use of children too young to object to what was given them to wear. Throughout the room there was a steady babble of talk.

The children were gathered at the farther and lighter end of the room. Charlie Grace, whose entrance had been unnoticed, slipped into a dim corner and sat down. He felt himself smiling as he watched Esther Legrand flitting from group to group, examining, criticizing, correcting, approving, like the *patron* of an atelier. Now and then she took a hand at a seam or a hem herself to show how it should be done. All sorts of observations greeted her as she passed along.

"Teacher, do you like apples?"

"Teacher, what makes your hair so red?"

"Teacher, did your grandmother fight in the Civil War?"

"Teacher, your cheeks is just like roses."

"Teacher, I give my school-teacher a flower, and the next week she slapped me."

"Teacher, I like you for a teacher."

"Teacher, my momma says if our house burns down I'll get a new dress."

The twilight deepened, and the moment for dispersion came. Esther seated herself at the shrill rattle-trap of a piano, which had accompanied Charlie Grace himself when he was a boy, and they sang a hymn.

Now the day is over,
Night is drawing nigh,
Shadows of the evening
Steal across the sky.

He couldn't help humming a bass to Esther Legrand's fine mezzo, which was the richer for the harsh, energetic shrilling of the little girls.

The hymn ended, and a few words of counsel spoken as to the necessity of going directly home, the children filed away. "G'by, Miss Legran'!" "G'by, Miss Legran'!" "G'by, teacher." "G'-by, Miss Legra-an'!" They came chattering down the room, to fall silent as they caught sight of him, and stare with big, black, solemn eyes. It was doubtless the pause in their chatter that drew Esther's glance toward him.

She came to him at once. "Why, Mr. Grace! How *lovely!*"

She wore a dress of some dark stuff, partially covered by a pinafore, of which the upper section was pinned against the breast. In the free grace of her movements he thought again of collies bounding on the grass. More deliberately than at any of their previous meetings he noted the shapeliness of her head, its poise, its pride. He contrasted, too, her easy absence of self-consciousness with Hilda's tense repose. He compared them as one compares an emerald with a pearl—only to get the beautiful distinctions between them.

"I'm so sorry father and mother are out," she went on, without embarrassment. "They'll be sorry, too. Father is out of town; but mother will be home soon, if you could come in. We had no

idea you were in New York. Is Mrs. Grace with you? We should so like to see her."

He explained that they were in the city for a few days only, on business, but that they were going away at once. "So this is one of the famous sewing-classes," he added, turning the conversation on herself. "Do you do this sort of thing all the time?"

"This sort of thing or some other sort of thing. I get lots of variety."

"Like the variety of tunes on the bagpipes. The tunes are different—but it's always the bagpipes."

"And the bagpipes are beautiful—to a Scotchman. *He* doesn't need any other kind of music. All you require is the taste."

"Which I understood you to say you hadn't got."

"Oh no, you didn't; at least if you did you followed me very inattentively. I said I mightn't have the taste by nature, but that I'd had plenty of opportunity to acquire it—or something like that. As a matter of fact, our most refined tastes are generally those we've cultivated. Isn't that true?"

His eye roved over the familiar room. "So you haven't yet got your new parish-house."

"No; but I think we're going to have a new sewing-machine. You can't imagine what that's going to mean to us—if we get it. If Miss Smedley buys a new one for herself she'll give us the old one. The big girls are wild to learn to work it, and of course they ought to. They get better places with a little experience of that kind. Mother would let us use hers—only of course the girls would be hard on it, so I don't like to ask her. I'm so excited over the sewing-machine that I can't think about a parish-house."

"As much excited as over 'Faust?'"

"W-well, I could hardly say that. Wasn't it lovely! And what do you think? I've been to the opera again."

"What, *again?* Isn't that rather going the pace?"

She nodded, making an affirmative sound that might be transcribed as: "M'h! m'h! Only the other day. My cousin—my very, very distant cousin—Mrs. Peter Legrand asked me. I dined with them, too. She'd seen us the night we went with you. She didn't know me, but she recognized mother. Perhaps that reminded her to ask me. But I rather think it must have been Mr. Coningsby."

"Mr.—*who?*"

He tried to detect some trace of self-consciousness in her manner, but she answered frankly: "He's the young architect who's been doing the repairs on the church. Didn't you know we'd had the church done over this summer? Well, we had. It needed it very badly. So Mr. Coningsby used to come in sometimes to lunch. He's a friend of the Peter Legrands."

"And the Rufus Legrands," Charlie Grace said, dryly.

"Oh, hardly that; but he's very nice. Won't you really come in and have tea? Mother must be home quite soon now."

He excused himself, however, and said good-by. As he walked up Vandiver Place he recognized the plump figure picking its way rather heavily among the bales and packing-cases, and dodging the groups of swarthy girls pouring out of Blum & Rosenbaum's emporium for artificial flowers. He thought again of the slim, lithe figure of his childhood, with its

spun-sugar chignon and Grecian bend. He wondered if the year 1930, or thereabouts, would see Esther lumbering laboriously—disappointed, poor—as Mrs. Coningsby. The vision displeased him; though, as he was careful to remind himself, it was no concern of his.

Mrs. Legrand's greeting was distant without being absolutely cold. It was easy to see that in her eyes his value had gone down. Beneath the usual questions concerning his stay in New York and his wife's health he could almost read a disapproving inquiry as to why he should be hanging about Vandiver Place. He thought it well to explain that he had come with a view to discussing with Mr. Legrand the possibility of a parish-house in memory of his, Charlie Grace's, father.

Mrs. Legrand showed no more enthusiasm than he had expected. Perhaps she showed a little less. She looked up and down the street before responding.

"I hope it won't mean more work for Esther," she said, a little querulously. "She's doing too much now—with her social duties as well. She's going out a great deal at present—with our cousin, Mrs. Peter Legrand. The opera has got to be quite an old story. She was with them in their box the other night. Then, with dining out so much— Well, you can see I don't want her to get taken up with mere slum work any more than I can help."

Expressing his sympathy with this point of view, Charlie Grace took his leave, and was about to pass on when the lady, apparently struck with a new idea, detained him.

"Of course, if you should do this thing, Charlie—

such a noble idea!—I wish you'd think of a young architect friend of ours, a Mr. Coninsgby. As a matter of fact, he's Ralph Coningsby—grandson of *the* Ralph Coningsby—and you couldn't have much better than that, don't you know you couldn't? We've been seeing a good deal of him lately—well, for one reason or another. Mr. Legrand is very much pleased with the work he's done on the church, so that if a parish-house *were* to be built—"

Promising to take this recommendation earnestly into consideration, Charlie Grace continued on his way toward Broadway. It was the hour when the great thoroughfare was beginning to light up. To a young New-Yorker whose years were so largely spent in exile the spectacle was ever new and wonderful. It was inspiriting, too, and exciting. It brought into being a world more mysterious, more suggestive, than that of daytime—a world in which at any minute things might happen, incongruous with the placid light of the sun. There was no time at which Charlie Grace more thoroughly enjoyed a stroll through the two or three streets that made up all that was important to him in his native town.

Those were the early days of the electric aerial advertisement. For Charlie Grace it was still so novel that as he walked northward his eye was caught by one flaming word that seemed to be written like a portent in the sky. It was RINGER. It flared above the tallest spire, and higher than any of the high buildings which at that time were just beginning to astound the pygmy sons of men. It was like an apt title to a novel or a play. It set the mind to speculating as to what could lie behind the daring laconic symbol. For a space of thirty seconds he

could not have said, till suddenly it flashed on him that it meant sewing-machines.

As a sign from heaven the beacon had the effect aimed at by its authors. The young man kept his eye on it till he was close beneath the tower from which it shone. As there was still a half-hour before closing-time he paused to look in at the window of a brilliantly lighted, red-carpeted salon, in which sewing-machines were disposed in all the attitudes and angles that could tempt one to sew. It was an affair of some ten minutes to enter and order two of the most expensive and most thoroughly equipped to be sent to Miss Esther Legrand, St. David's Rectory, Vandiver Place. The bill could be handed in at once at the hotel, where it would be duly paid. By this expedition the gift could be delivered the first thing in the morning. Pleased with his promptitude in carrying out benevolent inspiration, the young man continued on his way.

It was part of his good intention toward Hilda to be scrupulous in the account he meant to give her of his day's doings. The very fact that there were details he would have preferred keeping to himself rendered him the more determined to tell her everything. He hastened to her at once on entering the hotel.

Her guests having departed, she was seated alone in the embrasure of the rounded window of her sitting-room looking down on the lights and movement of Fifth Avenue and Thirty-third Street. Except for one shaded electric lamp, the room was dim. He drew a chair close to hers, taking her hand. He began at once on the happy termination of his errand to New York. Seeing she was not

giving him her close attention, he felt his tone of triumph flag as he went on. He was doing his best to spur himself along when she broke in suddenly.

"Charlie, did you know that that Mr. Ellis—the one Sir William Short wanted to send to New York —was living in Brooklyn?"

The question astonished him so that he could hardly frame the answer, "No." He managed to add, however: "How *should* I know it?"

"He's ill—and poor. Did you know that?"

He shook his head. "I haven't heard of him for over a year—not since he got mad and threw up his job at Winnipeg."

Her next question startled him still more. "What was it you did to get him out of your way?"

He was prompt in replying: "I did—hardly anything. Why are you asking?"

She looked down at the lights lining Fifth Avenue, to where they were lost in the blur of Madison Square. "His wife turns out to be a connection of the Merediths."

"Well?"

"Well, they think he's been badly treated. He thinks so, too."

He shrugged his shoulders. "That's quite possible. Every ill-tempered, disgruntled Johnny thinks himself badly treated."

"He wasn't badly treated by you, Charlie, was he?"

He tried to smile. "I hope not. I didn't treat him in any way—badly or otherwise."

"And yet you did something to him, because I remember your saying—it was at Nice—that you'd got him out of the running, that he was done for."

He reflected a minute. "I may have said that. As a matter of fact, he *was* done for."

"And you had done for him?"

"If so—and I don't admit that it's so—I did for him before he did for me. That's all there was to it. I didn't make him ill—if he is ill. I didn't make him lose his money, either. He had some. I suppose he must have speculated with it and chucked it away. That's the usual thing."

She was still looking down at the lights of Fifth Avenue as she said: "Would you mind telling me, Charlie, just what you did do?"

He pushed back his chair and sprang up. "Look here," he said, not indignantly, but in a tone of animated argument, "what's it leading up to? Has the old lady Meredith been putting ideas into your head about me?"

"She never mentioned you, Charlie, except to say that, as you had influence on the Trans-Canadian, perhaps you could get work for him again."

"Well, perhaps I can—if he isn't too ill to be fit for it."

"She had no idea who had stabbed him in the back. No, don't be annoyed, Charlie! I'm not saying that; it's what she said. And because she did say it—and I knew you'd done something to this Mr. Ellis—it's very natural that I should want to be in a position to defend you."

"Defend me? To whom? To old Mrs. Meredith?"

She looked up at him with steady eyes. "No; to myself."

He took a turn about the room, coming back and standing before her. "To yourself. Does that mean that you're inclined to—to attack me?"

"That's unkind, Charlie. Surely you must see that you puzzle me—that you bewilder me. I love you; I've married you; and yet you seem to be surrounded by a background of shadows, out of which anything might come. If you wouldn't mind telling me what you did to Mr. Ellis you might dispel them. Anyhow, I should know."

"Very well, then; I will." He took another turn about the room, as if to collect his thoughts. "It came to my knowledge," he stated, returning to confront her again, "that Ellis had once been dismissed from a position of some responsibility in a bank in one of the secondary towns of the state of New York. He wasn't accused of anything—publicly, that is; he was simply suspected and—dismissed. After that the thing was hushed up. I mentioned the fact to Osborne; Osborne mentioned it to Sir William Short, and Sir William Short dropped him. That's the whole story. You can see for yourself that a man who had that flaw in his record wouldn't do for the position he wanted."

With his hands thrust into his trousers pockets he wheeled away from her. She sat for a few minutes deep in her own thoughts, her eyes fixed on the floor. "And I suppose," she said, meditatively, "that you were *looking* for a flaw in his record when the knowledge came to you."

He shrugged his shoulders. "If you'd ever seen much of the men who go to the new countries you'd know that the flaw in the record is the tender point."

"So that if you want to get rid of any one it's the spot at which to strike."

"That's about the size of it," he said, grimly.

"It *is* a little like stabbing, isn't it?"

"Not in the back."

"Well, from the front, then—but stabbing just the same."

"It's what he would have done to me if he'd had the chance."

"I don't see that that's exactly what we're concerned with. It's what you've done to him—"

"But good Lord, Hilda, don't you see that a man who'd had that kind of scandal behind him—however carefully it had been smothered up—couldn't have represented the Trans-Canadian in New York?"

"Oh, if your motive was to safeguard the Trans-Canadian—"

He flung out his hands impatiently. "My motive was to get ahead of him—to cut him out. Don't let us have any misunderstanding about that. I saw that I had him on the hip, and I took him there. I had no scruples about it, because it was the only thing to do. It's what's been done to me a dozen times—and by fellows who've pretended to be my best friends. They *were* my best friends, too—only friendship can't interfere with a thing of this kind. It's you do me or I do you—and if you do me first, why, then I must be a pretty poor loser if I squeal about it. Ellis did squeal—threw up his job—the job in which they'd have left him unmolested if he'd been cashiered from fifty banks—so that now I suppose he's got what's coming to him."

"And you'll get what's coming to *you*, Charlie, won't you?"

He stared at her. "If by that you mean—New York—"

"Yes; that's what I do mean."

He laughed hardly. "By George, I hope so."

"And I shall get it, too."

"Get it, too? Get it—how?"

"I mean that I shall have to share it—share the results of what you did to Mr. Ellis."

"Oh, come, Hilda! You can't reason that way. If you did, where would any of us be? This is nothing—*nothing*—compared to the things other people do—to the things I've done myself, if you want me to be frank. You've got to take the world as you find it, my dear old dad used to say. Perhaps that's what's the matter with you—that you don't. You've lived so long in dreams—"

She smiled drearily. "I begin to think I have, Charlie."

"Well, then, darling, you'll find it a very good plan to wake up. You can't live long in dreams in New York—nor in any other part of the American continent. I grant you that it's one of the most idealizing countries in the world—only the minute you attempt to put your ideals into practice you're down and out. You may take that from me."

The dreary smile was still on her lips as she said, "Apparently, I must take a good many things from you."

He thought it best to ignore this thrust by going into his room to wash his hands. That would bring the conversation to an end. He was rubbing his hands slowly on the towel, thinking of the mess women made of things the minute they peered into a man's concerns—his pipes or his boots, his business matters or his love affairs—when he heard his name called sharply. "Charlie! Come here!" He hur-

ried to the threshold of the sitting-room. A bell-boy had entered and was standing in the middle of the room. Hilda was holding what seemed to be a telegram close to the shaded electric lamp.

"What on earth does this mean? 'To Two Number Three Ringers supplied to Miss Esther Legrand, St. David's Rectory, Vandiver Place—one hundred and twenty dollars.' They want to know if it's to be paid."

During the reading he had time to curse himself for his carelessness in forgetting to speak of the thing at the office before he came up-stairs. As it was, he could only stride across the room, snatch the paper from her hand, and thrust it back upon the boy. "Yes; pay it," he said, savagely.

"What in the world are Number Three Ringers?" she gasped, before the retreating boy had closed the door behind him.

He tried to be jocular. "That's what I was going to tell you if you hadn't insisted on talking of this other business. They're sewing-machines."

"*Sewing*-machines?"

"For the sewing-classes—lot of little girls. The older ones are wild to learn to sew on the sewing-machines. They ought to learn, too. They get better places for a little experience of that kind."

He tried to repeat with as much sang-froid as possible what he remembered Esther to have said. Hilda listened to him with lips parted and wide-open eyes.

"Since when have you been taking an interest in sewing-classes for little girls?"

"Oh, this ever so long. It's what they go in for now at old St. David's."

"You mean it's what Miss Legrand goes in for."

"Oh, she's only one of them. They've a lot of women working about the place—philanthropic work, don't you know—moral uplift and all that sort of thing. Make them good American citizens."

"And you supply them with sewing-machines?"

"Well, there's no harm in that, is there? I should have said it was the very thing you would have approved of. You always seem to think I'm not doing enough good. Isn't it possible that I may be doing more than you imagined—"

"Oh, quite. I never imagined anything like this."

"Not that I wasn't going to *tell* you—"

"Wouldn't that have been a pity? With such generosity as yours it's surely better not to let the left hand know what the right hand is doing—"

"Now, now, Hilda! Why should you make a fuss? You can hardly say that a sewing-machine—even two sewing-machines—is a very compromising gift."

She blazed. "Compromising? Who said—compromising? Is there any *reason* why it should have been compromising?"

"Not unless you see one, Hilda."

She looked at him long and slowly before speaking. "What I do see is this, Charlie—that you terrify me. There's something about you strange and—mysterious—and—appalling. I don't know what you mightn't do—what you wouldn't do—what, at any minute, I sha'n't learn that you *have* done—"

"If all that's because I've given a couple of sewing-machines to a class of little Italian girls—"

She moved toward her bedroom door, putting out

her hand with a backward protesting gesture, as she fled. "Oh—*don't!*"

She shut the door behind her and locked it. The sound of the turning of the key grated on him curiously. It was as if she were locking herself against him. He stood for some minutes in the middle of the room, rueful, disconsolate. The sense of brutality, of guilt, came over him again. He tiptoed to her door and listened. If he heard her crying he would insist on being let in. But she was not crying. All was painfully still. He went back again aimlessly to the middle of the room. Aimlessly, too, he took out his cigar-case, chose a cigar, and snipped off the end. Holding the cigar between his teeth, he fumbled absently for his match-box, only to stand with the match in his hand, without striking it. More vividly than at any previous moment it was borne in on him that Hilda was his old self risen again. She still held the ideals—the high, impractical ideals—with which he himself had started out, only to find them unsuited to American conditions, as those conditions were when the nineteenth century was merging into the twentieth. He had no objection to those ideals in themselves. On the contrary, he would have continued to hold them had he found other men of affairs doing the same. If he discarded them it was only because they put him at a disadvantage. Hilda seemed to hold the astounding theory that one could be put at a disadvantage and make no complaint. It was the fundamental error in all her points of view; and as her husband he felt it his duty to convince her of the mistake. With this purpose he went boldly to her door, lifting his hand to knock.

In the end it was a premonition of the uselessness of any such attempt that withheld him. He was beginning to understand something of her immovability. It was the tenacity her mother had warned him about beforehand, the sort of thing with which reason couldn't deal. He crossed the room again, this time passing through the door of his own dressing-room and locking it behind him. He locked it without thinking; but when he did think, it was to make the reflection that if his old self was to be shut against him they would be mutually shut against each other.

CHAPTER IX

WHEN Charlie Grace was next called to New York there could be no question as to his going. Osborne and Emma had come to Minnesaba, the latter to visit Hilda, the former to discuss with his brother-in-law the plans for the acquisition by the T.-C. R. of the Buffalo & New London Railway, which would give the Canadian system its long-desired outlet through New England. Though the business would be nominally managed by Mr. Purvis, the T.-C. R. magnates at Montreal would look to Charlie Grace, who had already proved his ability for matters of the kind, to "put it through" in the more delicate details of the operation. He was not so well known a figure but that he could come and go between the parties most concerned without calling attention to himself either from the press or from the representatives of rival lines. Negotiations begun a few years earlier through Ellis had dropped when the latter fell into disfavor. As the matter was becoming urgent again, it was necessary that certain powerful persons in New York and elsewhere should be sounded without delay; and there was no one, in the opinion of the T.-C. R., so well fitted for that task as Charlie Grace.

"Whole business going to be a long one," Osborne explained, in Hilda's presence, "so that as soon as

your little affair here is well out of the way you'd both better pack up for Manhattan."

Hilda smiled, her old dreamy smile, in which there was now a shade that Charlie Grace could only qualify as bitter-sweet. She said nothing till, Osborne having left the room, she was alone with her husband.

"So you've got it at last," she remarked then, the bitter-sweet smile playing on him steadily.

"Got what?"

"What you were working for—what Mr. Ellis would have had."

He turned with a despairing gesture. "Oh, hang it, Hilda, don't go bringing that up all the rest of our lives!"

"I don't bring it up, Charlie. It's never down."

"What on earth would you have me do? Do you want me to tell Osborne I can't undertake this business—?"

She shook her head. "No. I don't see how you can do that now. That's the irony of it, isn't it? Having struck down a man who was trying to retrieve himself—who *had* retrieved himself—you're obliged to profit by his fall."

"Very well, then. As there's no way of going back, why keep talking of it?"

"*Keep* talking of it? Have I mentioned it since the one and only time we ever spoke of it? That was in New York, in November; and now it's February. But you needn't be afraid, Charlie. I shall never bring it up again."

"But you'll go on thinking of it."

"I'll try not even to do that—except when I can't help it."

He would have let the matter rest there had he not been impelled to make his position better by a final word. "At least, I've never deceived you as to my motives in life being what *you* would call sordid; now, have I?"

She admitted the truth of this.

"I've never denied the fact that my object was to make money by what you've already said on one occasion was fair means or foul."

An inclination of the head expressed her assent to this.

"And you wouldn't have married me if it hadn't been so."

She clung to the mantelpiece of the dining-room in which they had been talking. "I wouldn't have married you unless I had—had cared for you."

He seemed to square himself in front of her. "But you wouldn't have cared for me unless I'd had the money. Now, would you?"

She colored. "I—I don't know what you mean, Charlie. If you want to imply that I had mercenary motives—"

"No, I don't," he broke in, quickly. "Your motives were neither better nor worse than those of other people in a similar position. You cared for me because I'm what I am. And I'm what I am because I've got the money. How I got it is secondary to you, as it's secondary to everybody else. The world is full of high-principled, right-meaning people who haven't words enough to express their scorn of the man who grows rich by what they choose to consider improper means, but who, when it comes to personal dealings, can't show him too plainly how much they respect him."

She seemed to grow taller. Her eyes blazed. "And you class me in their number?"

"I don't put you lower, darling, than I put the whole order of bishops, priests, and deacons, and all the other idealists who are so easily outraged by our brutal modern ways of growing rich. They're awfully fluent in words; but once *get* rich, and"—he snapped his fingers—"you can do what you like with them."

She still clung to the mantelpiece, looking down into the fireplace, where logs were spluttering. "You don't have to tell me that to show me you've a poor opinion of human nature—"

"But I haven't. That's just it. I'm not blaming them. On the contrary, I think their actions prove them wiser than their words. Every one is likely to speak foolishly; but when he acts with discretion he can be pardoned. I don't care what any one thinks of the way in which I've made my little bit of money, so long as he respects *me*. I'm not quarreling with you, Hilda, darling. Have your own opinion. It doesn't make any difference to me whatever. I merely ask you to remember that you'd never have looked at me twice if I'd been the noble, unselfish creature who wants to safeguard every one else's interests before he considers his own —and so wouldn't have had a comfortable home to offer you. You wouldn't have looked at me twice. That's not mercenary. It's only human. I admire you for it the more. Only, if I were you, I should try to admire myself—from precisely that point of view."

As she stood with one foot on the fender, her forehead bowed on the hand that still clung to the edge

of the chimney-piece, he stooped and kissed her hair. Glancing over his shoulder on leaving the room, he saw, not without a pang, that she kept this attitude of reverie or depression. He could not, however, eat his words, seeing they were true. He could only hope that a salutary truth might help her in taking a more reasonable view of things. The subject was not renewed between them, nor did they recover from some constraint, during the days that intervened before his departure; but when he actually said good-by she hung about his neck with the silent, tearless desperateness of a woman who might have been seeing her husband go to exile or to execution.

Leaving Emma to watch over her sister-in-law for the three months that remained of her waiting, Charlie Grace set out with Osborne for Montreal. From Montreal—after the necessary interviews with Sir William Short and other dignitaries—he passed to Buffalo, to Boston, to New London, and finally to New York. He made his visits to the secondary cities with so much caution, and used so much discretion in seeing the representative citizens to whom his errands were, that on reaching the metropolis it was a relief to go about openly and do what he pleased. He argued that a thousand reasons, or no reason at all, would take one to New York, whereas one would never go to Buffalo, Boston, or New London unless one had a motive. No one would ever ask what he was doing in lower Broadway; while his appearance in Eagle Street, or Tremont Street, or on the banks of the Connecticut Thames might start speculation. In New York he could therefore allow himself to relax—to visit the theaters and the opera, and take part in pleasant

reunions in clubs and private houses. His days being feverishly occupied, and his evenings dull, he was glad of any form of friendliness or entertainment. For the third time in his life he knew the lonely, yearning ache that goes by the name of homesickness. He had felt it first the summer when his mother died; it had come again the year he left his father to visit Winnipeg and finally settle at Forde. From that time to this he had been free from it, and had sometimes congratulated himself that the possibility of it was past. But now, all of a sudden, it returned—bringing memories of his father and mother which grew oddly fused with those of Hilda and the house on the hill above Superior. He began to recognize it as one of the penalties of being married, of being a householder, and a prospective father.

It was the more to his credit, then, that he denied himself the pleasure, perhaps the solace, which drew his thoughts persistently to Vandiver Place. Not that he had any fear of it for himself; he was only determined that if, on his return to the West, the name of Esther Legrand were ever to come up, he should be in a position to say to Hilda that he hadn't seen the lady who bore it. He was the more resolved on this because he divined on Hilda's part, and almost read between the lines of her letters, the assumption that Miss Legrand and he were daily in each other's company.

And yet there was an occasion when these good intentions came to naught. It was a wild, wet afternoon at the end of February—an afternoon on which, having nothing to do, he was dull, depressed, and bored. It was one of those moments in which even

the city-loving soul finds the resources of a capital but vanity. Moreover, he was worried, tired, and not well. The thought of his old rectory home was positively comforting; and if within it he found a bright, cheery face, more lovely than any face he knew—except Hilda's, he said to himself loyally—well, hang it all! it could only do him the more good.

Twilight was already closing in as he drew near St. David's. The door being open, with its customary welcome, he went in. Life for the minute seemed so hollow that he would have enjoyed a few words with Remnant; but Remnant was not to be found. Amiens Cathedral was empty, and except for a solitary gas-jet beside the organ, on the right-hand side of the chancel, it was dim. The wind soughed through the old choir-loft, and along the vaulting of the aisles, while the rain rattled against the elongated stained-glass lights, now all but colorless.

With an eery feeling he was about to withdraw, in order to approach the rectory by the usual way, when a deep pedal note on the organ startled him. The note was followed by a prelude; the prelude by a voice. He slipped into the nearest pew, and sat down.

Oh, rest in the Lord; wait patiently for Him; and He shall give thee thy heart's desire. Submit thy way unto Him; and trust in Him. Oh, rest in the Lord; wait patiently for Him.

He had only once before heard Esther sing—in the simple melody of a hymn—so that he was not prepared for this full richness of voice, with its unaffected

sympathy. And yet, he reasoned, it was just in this way she ought to sing—spontaneously, without effort, in the dim solitude of a church, alone, without listeners, giving out the sweet holiness of her nature as unconsciously as a flower sheds fragrance on the night.

There was a turning of leaves, and presently she began again.

How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, that bring glad tidings, glad tidings of good things.

Again it was:

He was despised—despised and rejected—a man of Sorrows, and acquainted with grief. He hid not his face from shame—from shame and spitting—a man of Sorrows, and acquainted with grief.

For a half-hour she sang, always from the old familiar oratorios which seemed to be the natural speech of her simple, moving sincerity.

Charlie Grace felt himself deeply stirred, not by the words, nor by the music, nor yet by Esther Legrand, so much as by this quality of noble utterance. It was thus that Hilda should have sung. It was the voice to go with her face, her eyes, her personality. If her locked soul could only open itself outward it would doubtless be in some such way as this that it would want to find expression. He dwelt on the words: her locked soul. It was the first time they had come to him. But since they *had* come, he could see he had found the phrase he had been in search of. That was surely the difference between

these two natures—the one open and sunlit, the other sacred and sealed. It was sacred and sealed even to him. There had been a time when he had dreamed of the privilege of forcing his way into it, when he had fancied that one day the invisible bolts would be drawn, and he should be invited to enter its holy solitudes. But the day had not come yet, and he was beginning to doubt that it ever would come. There was a degree to which Hilda could transcend the mental or spiritual spaces that somehow lay between them, and come into his life; but she could never admit him into hers. That was barred against him, as it had been barred against her mother and every one else, as far as he knew, who had ever approached her. In the more superficial aspects of life, her manner, her dress, her voice, her choice of words, her way of receiving guests, her dignity even with himself, she charmed him to the point of reverence. He had never known any one to whom the word lady could so fittingly be applied. But when it came to things more intimate there was a lack of point of contact. His ideals were alien to her; and as for hers, she had not as yet given him her confidence. With regard to so simple a thing as the kind of life they were to lead on settling into a home of their own she had no outbursts of expansiveness. She listened to him; she smiled dreamily; but she let the matter drop. After nearly a year of married life he was still ignorant of her preferences. He could only ascribe to her the tastes other women had, and take for granted that she would be pleased with a handsome establishment. There was one point on which he began to feel a growing fear. In her love for him—*if* she loved him—and of that he

was not wholly sure—he wondered if she might not be like the sea-women of legend, who clasped their arms round a man's neck in one desperate, strangling embrace, and dragged him downward.

Nevertheless, she had so long inspired his imagination that she filled it now. It was of her he thought chiefly while Esther Legrand's voice, with the mellow organ accompaniment, filled the church. It was of her he was still thinking when the voice ceased, and the single light was extinguished, and the singer went away.

For a few minutes he continued to sit in the darkening nave thinking vaguely of many things. When he rose at last it was to turn his steps homeward. He had had enough of Esther Legrand's personality for one day. He had an idea that more might not be good for him.

Some twenty paces from the church door he encountered Rufus Legrand. It was perhaps to give a plausible explanation of his presence in Vandiver Place, when no such explanation was needed, that Charlie Grace began at once on the subject of the memorial to his father.

Rufus Legrand's eyes searched the younger man's with the kindly scrutiny of one with whom it has become a primary habit to look behind the outward mask to what is hidden in the soul. "Suppose you come back with me. Then we could talk about it."

So, within a few minutes, Charlie Grace found himself seated in the rectory study, which he had last seen on the day when he had left his father's house for good. It was not greatly changed. The books, the desk, the worn sofa, the leather-covered

chairs, the very photographs of English cathedrals on the walls, might have dated from his father's time. Youthful recollections of all kinds came confusedly back to him to culminate and become clear in that of the night when he and his father had sat together here on the return from his mother's funeral.

Possibly the present incumbent of St. David's had similar thoughts, for he said, when they had got seated, "How strange it is, Charlie, that you and I should be talking of a memorial to your father in this particular room, which seems so full of his presence."

Very affectionately they discussed reminiscences of Dr. Grace till they got back to the subject in hand.

"I should like to do it handsomely," the son said, not without feeling, "and set aside a sum of money for its decent upkeep. I don't want to saddle the church with an additional item of expense."

The rector expressed his appreciation of this, adding, "It will not only greatly facilitate our work, but it gives me satisfaction that your generosity should take this form."

Charlie Grace reflected, his arm resting on the flat-topped desk near which he sat and his eyes fixed vaguely on the buff-colored blind hung flatly against the pointed window. "I'm afraid generosity isn't the word," he said, pensively. "I feel I ought to explain that. I'm not doing the thing from generous motives."

Rufus Legrand, his elbows on the arms of his chair, which stood in one of the corners of the room, fitted the tips of his fingers together in the manner traditional with ecclesiastics. A faint smile played

over his keen ascetic face. "You're doing it from motives that will seem generous—to us."

"You mean that you'll take the donation and give me the benefit of the doubt."

"If there *is* a doubt. But in the case of a memorial to your father I don't see where the doubt could come in."

"I do. And yet," he added, meditatively, "I don't know whether to tell you about it or not."

"Why shouldn't you?"

"Because, if I did, you mightn't want the thing."

"In that case don't you think we ought to know?"

"It's something I should be quite justified in saying nothing about; and yet if I do say nothing about it I may give you a false impression. It's this," he continued, after some thinking; "in giving this building to St. David's I shouldn't like to be considered as a sort of benefactor to the Church—I mean the organized Christian Church—because—well, because I'm opposed to the organized Christian Church. I've been opposed to it for a good many years, as perhaps you know."

"No; I didn't know—at least, not definitely." Then, after reflection, "And if you object to appearing as a benefactor of the Christian Church, how should I have to understand you to be offering us this aid to our work?"

"I should be trying to reassert my father's reputation—and I should be doing it vindictively."

Rufus Legrand nodded, slowly. "I see. It would be a bit of retaliation; but it would be noble retaliation."

"Not as I should feel it. It would only be noble because I can't find any other way of doing it."

"That is," the clergyman smiled, "you find that a good tree must bring forth good fruit in spite of your wishes to the contrary."

"If by the good tree you mean me, sir, you're mistaken. I'm a bad lot."

In hearing himself pronounce these words Charlie Grace was startled, but once they were uttered he recognized them as what, subconsciously, he had long wanted to say. It was a relief to have the thing out—not to have to suppress it or dissimulate it any longer. He had not even been aware of suppression and dissimulation till this minute of being candid with himself. The solace of the moment was like that from discomfort which a man has taken as a matter of course, not supposing it can be eased.

Legrand continued to smile gently. "A bad lot—how?"

"Oh, in different ways. Morally, for one thing."

"And for another?"

"Oh, I'm a rotter all round. I don't think I can express it better than that."

The brief silence that ensued gave these words a sort of solemnity. "You've been a good man of affairs," the rector said, tentatively.

"It depends on what you mean by good. I've been a successful one—on a modest scale."

"And you're happily married."

"Very." The word came out with a kind of metallic assertiveness, as though he feared contradiction. He couldn't have told what impelled him to add, "But I'm a rotter even there."

"Do you mean that you haven't made your wife happy?"

"I doubt if I ever could. I'm not the sort of nature a woman like her can admire."

"But you've been faithful—"

"Oh yes—so far—in the letter." He paused before adding, "I'm not so sure about the spirit."

"That is, you haven't been free from temptation—"

He shrugged his shoulders. "If you choose to use the word. By nature I'm a—I'm a—Turk," he declared with an embarrassed laugh. "But that isn't it." There was another pause. Now that he had begun on it, he grew interested in his own case. It was like the satisfaction he occasionally got in describing his symptoms to a doctor. "When I spoke of myself as a rotter," he went on, at last, "I meant that I might be—I may be—falling in love with another woman."

Rufus Legrand betrayed neither surprise nor dismay, though the gentle smile gave place to a look of gravity. "Is that a process like a fever that has to take its course? Or is there a preventative—"

"I don't know of any preventative but drowning—or strangulation. It's the sort of thing with which you can only take violent measures—like choking it to death."

"Well, then, why don't you take them?"

"That's more easily said than done," he returned, moodily.

"Since you've given me your confidence so far, may I venture to inquire if the lady in question is what is conventionally known as a good woman or not?"

"Oh, she's good. That's just it. If I were to fall in love with her, it would be in the first place with her goodness."

"Then that's a safeguard, isn't it? Especially," he added, as an afterthought, "if she isn't in love with you?"

"She's not in love with me," he declared, with some emphasis. Then, in qualification: "But I don't know that she mightn't be—if we were to see much of each other. You understand that I'm saying so not in fatuity, but in fear."

"Oh, quite so. But isn't it the obvious inference that she shouldn't see much of you?"

Charlie Grace got up and began to pace the floor. "That's one of the good resolutions not so easy to keep. All sorts of things throw people together, whether they will or no."

"And of this secondary attachment—if it *is* an attachment—I presume your wife has no idea at all."

"Oh yes, she has."

"So soon? You've only been married—let me see—when was it?"

"Last April. Not quite a year. But it had begun before that—I mean this other thing. My wife knew about it because—well, because I don't think I should have realized it myself if it hadn't been for her."

Legrand pondered. "That's a little abstruse—"

"I mean," Charlie Grace continued, "that it was my wife who put the notion into my head. She let me see she was afraid of it, and so I've begun to perceive that there's something for her to be afraid of. It's action and reaction, you see. I dare say I should have found it out for myself sooner or later, but I *hadn't* found it out when Hilda began—"

"To show she was unhappy."

"To show she was imaginative. As a matter of fact, it wouldn't make any difference to her, because I should love her just the same even if— You see," he tossed off, as he tramped up and down, "men are born polygamous, say what you will."

The clergyman smiled. "Men may be born polygamous, as you say; and yet polygamy doesn't make for happiness, does it? You yourself are less satisfied with life than you would be if your instincts were—well, let us say monogamous?"

"I don't know. I'm all mixed up. I'm all at sea."

"And probably the spring of your trouble lies there. Isn't it possible that you lack a definite guiding principle—?"

He came to a halt, in order to say, firmly: "No, sir. I don't lack that. I've a very clear guiding principle. I adopted it years ago—in this very house—after a conversation with my father. I've been true to it all along." He allowed a few seconds to pass before adding, "It's to consider no one but myself."

"Ah? Indeed!"

"I'm rather crude in expressing it, because I've never made a secret of it from the first. It was one of the things that alienated me from religion, that so-called Christians adopted the same principle without being frank about it. If I'm over-frank, it's only that I don't want to be like them—and not that I mean to shock you."

"Oh, you don't shock me. After the life I've lived—and the many, many human souls I've had to deal with—it isn't possible to shock me at my age. I was only thinking that the principle you enunciate so—so concisely—is likely to end in com-

plications, isn't it? To consider no one but oneself seems relatively easy, as an academic theory; and yet when you try to put it into practice, in a civilization of which the dominant law is that you must consider other people too, you're very like a wild man running amuck."

To this Charlie Grace made no response. For some five or ten minutes he sat staring gloomily at the floor. When he looked up it was to say, with a half-smile: "I notice you don't offer me any advice, sir."

"You haven't asked for any. But if you had, what could I say that you don't know already?"

The younger man rose. "In any case, you've been awfully kind to listen to me. I don't know what's led me on to gassing in this way. I shall be sorry for it in the morning. I certainly should be, if it was any one but you."

They shook hands on this, and Legrand accompanied his guest to the hall. They were at the study door when the visitor said: "And what about the original proposal—my parish-house?"

Legrand looked at him with the keen, kindly gaze that was like a searchlight. They were both so tall that their eyes were on a level. "Don't you think you had better postpone that till—till you're in a different frame of mind?"

Charlie Grace nodded. "I see. That's what I was afraid of—that if I told you what a skunk I am you wouldn't want to take it."

"The point is not whether we should take it, but whether you should offer it. And as far as I understand you, I wouldn't offer it, if I were you, while you feel about yourself as you do."

"I don't see why not. I've got the money."

"Oh, money is not of much help. In work like ours nothing counts but good will."

"Isn't that an original point of view?—in the Church above all places?"

"I dare say that's how it strikes you. It's possible, too, that the Church is only beginning to understand that the weapons of its warfare are spiritual, not carnal. Certainly, whatever the good you can do with money that's given whole-heartedly, you can't accomplish much with what's offered with the grudge—you'll excuse the word, Charlie—which you'd attach to yours. It would be like trying to make a solid tower out of defective stone. Your parish-house, even as a memorial to your father, could only be a hindrance to us—"

Charlie Grace tilted his chin with an air of offense. "Oh, very well, then. That settles the question."

"No, my boy; it raises it. It raises it for your more thorough—and may I say, for your wiser—consideration."

They were moving along the hall toward the front door when Legrand said, hospitably: "There's generally tea going on at this hour. Won't you go into the drawing-room and speak to Mrs. Legrand? My daughter is probably there, too. They'll like to see you."

Charlie Grace excused himself with some vehemence. "I'm awfully sorry. I really can't. No, no," he insisted, as Legrand urged him toward the closed drawing-room door. "You *must* excuse me—"

But the sound of voices brought Esther into the

hall. "I was sure it was you, Mr. Grace," she cried, cordially. "I told mother so. Oh, do come in. There's something I want to ask you."

"There you are, you see," the rector laughed, pushing his guest gently over the threshold of the drawing-room, and closing the door, as he himself retreated to the study.

"Mother, here is Mr. Grace. Isn't it too lovely that I caught him? Now he'll have to tell us whether or not it was he who sent the sewing-machines. But I know it was he—however he may deny it."

Mrs. Legrand offered her hand elegantly from her place behind the tea-table. Her greeting had the courtesy without effusiveness which marked her bearing toward him since his marriage. "We're always glad to see you, Charlie, don't you know we are? And, oh, by the way— Mr. Grace, Mr. Coningsby—Mr. Coningsby, Mr. Grace."

CHAPTER X

CHARLIE GRACE was quick to perceive that by a display of friendliness toward the young man to whom he was thus introduced he could kill more than one bird with a stone. He could brace up his vacillating loyalty to Hilda; he could please Esther by being civil to a man who might be in love with her; and he could withdraw gracefully—in his own inner consciousness, at least—from putting forth any preposterous claims on her himself. After his confession of a few minutes earlier he needed the assurance that he was not such a rotter that he couldn't be magnanimous. Magnanimity would get him out of an absurd situation with honor, even though no one knew of the honor but himself.

The immediate result was, however, in another order of events.

"So you've been beautifying our old friend St. David's," he said, when, his manners to the ladies having been made, he could address himself to Coningsby.

The young man blushed boyishly, taking the attention as a compliment.

"Not beautifying. You *can't* always beautify old friends, what? They're best left to the ugliness we've grown fond of."

He spoke eagerly, with bright-blue eyes sparkling. A glance showed him to be the young American of

family traditions and Anglo-Saxon blood. With his fair skin, fair mustache, and flaxen hair already thin above the forehead, with his English clothes and way of speaking, he might have been a recent graduate of Oxford or Cambridge—except for his animation. While he was not much younger than Charlie Grace himself, the latter's larger frame and bronzed face, together with his general bearing as a man to whom things that stamp the character have happened, made the difference in their ages seem considerable.

Charlie Grace laughed. "I suppose St. David's *is* rather ugly, though I never thought of it before."

"Of course you wouldn't," Esther declared, warmly, as she passed cups of tea and cakes, "not any more than I should. St. David's is to Vandiver Place what a dear old flattened nose is to a dear old face, all wrinkles and bumps. You wouldn't change a detail of it for the world. Father says the most remarkable part of Mr. Coningsby's work is the respect he's shown for the mistakes they made in 1840. He says if Mr. Coningsby had been less of an artist he would have wanted to put right some of the things they left wrong, and so have made our poor old dear look worse through having a new patch on an old garment."

She held toward Coningsby the plate of bread-and-butter, looking down on him with a sort of motherly pride. It was a pride so lacking in coquetry or self-consciousness that Charlie Grace, in spite of his determination to count himself out, was guilty of a sense of reassurance. No girl ever looked in this way at the man she was in love with, nor spoke of him in this way, either. And yet, having made this observation, he added quickly that it was noth-

ing to *him* whether she was in love with any one or not.

Coningsby spoke with the ardor of a man who has his subject at heart. "Oh, you can't do much with what our ancestors have left behind them but tear it down or let it alone. In France they've only got to open a new street and throw the old work into perspective to get all the effect they require. Even in England, where there's never been much in the way of native inspiration, the minute you clap a wing in one style on to a house that's been built in another, time and climate mellow them into congruity. But at home we're hopeless, what? We've no architecture of our own, and we haven't yet found one that looks as if it really belonged to us."

"I don't agree with you," Mrs. Legrand said, with authority. "Surely nothing could be more New-Yorky than some of the houses lately put up in the Avenue and the streets east of the Park. You couldn't see them anywhere else in the world—architecture or no architecture."

"Oh, there are two or three French châteaux up that way," Coningsby admitted, "that wouldn't be bad if they had four or five hundred acres of land around them. And, by the way," he added, turning toward Esther, "I haven't yet found a buyer for the Pavillon de Flore."

"Oh, you will," she asserted, confidently. "He'll turn up."

Charlie Grace had the curiosity to ask the nature of the Pavillon de Flore, and Mrs. Legrand made the explanation. It was a little joke, she said, a little architectural joke, almost a family joke. It was

a house in East Seventy-fifth Street, for which Mr. Coningsby had been commissioned to find a purchaser by a gentleman who hadn't put it into the hands of the agents. Having built it for his wife, who died before it was finished, he had sentimental scruples about offering it for sale, and yet would be relieved to dispose of it privately.

"It's one of Keene & Carstairs' things," Coningsby explained, further. "People I studied with —was in their office, too, for a while, after I came back from the Beaux Arts. It isn't a bad house—or it wouldn't be, with some alteration. As it is, it's not everybody's money. Big rooms, and not enough of them—perfectly magnificent, one or two of them are—but no secondary accommodations. I call it the Pavillon de Flore—the end of the wing of the Louvre, you know, toward the Tuileries Gardens and the Seine—because it looks a little like it. One of the places that would only suit the right kind of people—which is why it's going at a bargain."

There was more talk of the Pavillon de Flore which Charlie Grace followed but inattentively. New suggestions were rising in his mind as rapidly as a covey of startled birds. Out of their incoherence he extracted two main thoughts—that the Pavillon de Flore might be the very thing for his future home, and that if he could put something practical in Ralph Coningsby's way it would be a proof of his disinterestedness. He took into consideration the fact that it wouldn't be business to buy a house merely to do Esther Legrand's young man a favor; but allowing for that, the place itself seemed, from what he was hearing, the thing he was in search of. He was not only in search of it, but he had had some

doubts of getting it. While he had not yet set himself seriously to the task of house-hunting, all such residences as he coveted had proved on inquiry to be beyond his means. He was beginning to realize that life in New York, on the scale on which he conceived of it, would be expensive. Too ambitious to accept anything but the best, and yet too prudent to become involved in what he couldn't see his way out of, he was not without a dread of being driven to Brooklyn or the west side of the Park. But the Pavillon de Flore sounded possible. A little François Premier *hôtel*, Coningsby called it; and while he, Charlie Grace, wasn't sure of what that meant, it sounded stately, and French, and like Hilda. He could much more easily see her in a little François Premier *hôtel*, whatever it might be, than in any purely American dwelling, however numerous the bathrooms.

"I'm looking for some sort of shelter myself," he ventured, when he had sufficiently made up his mind.

Coningsby flushed with embarrassment. "Oh, I didn't mean anything like that. I don't believe it would suit you, what?"

"Very likely it wouldn't, but there'd be no harm in my seeing, would there?"

"There'd be no harm in that," Esther corroborated, for Coningsby's encouragement. "Mr. Grace isn't going to think that just because you happened to mention the Pavillon de Flore you spotted him as a victim."

"And I shouldn't buy it to oblige you," Charlie Grace assured him, with a laugh. "Only if it did suit me, and I did buy it, I presume we should be happy all round. When can I have a look at it?"

Coningsby glanced at his watch. "Well, now if you like. It's only half past five. The electric light is installed, and I've got the key in my pocket."

In this way Charlie Grace became the owner of a house that particularly took his fancy. It was small in scale, yet spacious in all that met the eye, and looked its value. Moreover, since he had got it at a bargain, he could undoubtedly sell it, if he liked, in the course of the next ten years for twice what he paid. It was a home that Hilda would delight in. He had thought at first of consulting her by wire, but, as there couldn't be two opinions on the subject, and she could tell nothing from such descriptions as he could give, he judged that consultation was not worth while. The same reasoning kept him silent even when the title-deeds were in his strong-box. Since it might startle her to learn by letter that he had taken this important step without her co-operation, he considered it wiser to keep all information concerning it as the surprise of his return. With photographs to supplement his verbal accounts she would see at a glance that he had stumbled on the nest that destiny itself had prepared for their habitation.

This secrecy did not, however, interfere with much private joy in his new acquisition. He directed conversation to householding topics at all odd moments, in the offices of the Trans-Canadian, among his friends, and in his clubs. He discussed taxes, heating, and plumbing with other householders, and mentally collated their experiences. When the business of the day was over he strolled up the Avenue to East Seventy-fifth Street to stand on the opposite pavement and stare at his neat little

French façade; or, letting himself in with his latch-key and turning on all the lights, he wandered through the empty rooms. In his mind's eye he furnished them, putting Hilda here or there, in the graceful attitudes of hospitality which he knew her so capable of taking. Without being aware of it he saw her generally *en représentation*, receiving guests at the head of the staircase, with its sweeping wrought-iron balustrade, or surrounded by admiring friends in the silvery *grisaille* drawing-room, or presiding at dinners in the long dining-room paneled in richly toned old wood faintly relieved with gold. He had never yet seen her in surroundings that suited her. Now that he had found them, he was so moved with gratitude as to be almost capable of giving thanks to God.

Being unequal to that, he took all the credit to himself. For the first time since the beginning of his years of struggle he was able to say, with deep inbreathings of satisfaction, "I've done it—and I've done it alone." There was a grim joy in recalling the early days of pinched means—of means that seemed the more pinched because his father and mother had lived among people of wealth. He grew the less eager to reveal at once the secret of his new treasure to Hilda because of the bliss he got from hugging it awhile to himself.

He had not yet outworn this rapture when, one bright afternoon in early March as he walked up Fifth Avenue in the neighborhood of his hotel, his attention was caught by a well-equipped motor-brougham that drew up at the curb not many yards in front of him. The vehicle was of a style still tolerably novel, and his first thought was of its ap-

propriateness for his wife. His second was of the lady richly dressed in furs who descended from the brougham and crossed the pavement with smooth rapid step and distinctly noble bearing. Without having positively seen her features he could have sworn that it was Hattie Bright.

Since she had entered so public a place as Henderson's Art and Auction Gallery, he had no scruple as to following her in, finding himself in a modified Oriental bazar, where furniture, porcelains, rugs, pictures, and brocades stirred the imagination with a sense of gorgeous prodigality. He dropped into the nearest folding-chair as soon as he had discovered the lady in furs slightly in advance of him on the other side. Though he had thus a partial side view of her face, her thick veil kept him still in doubt as to her identity.

In the camp-chairs, arranged as in a concert-hall, some fifty or sixty persons were seated, a few of them fashionably dressed, many of them with Jewish features, and all wearing the air of being at home in auction-rooms. Even the lady whom Charlie Grace took to be Miss Bright scanned the catalogue carelessly, and looked about her with nonchalance. On a dais at the farther end of the room a broad-shouldered man with a patch over one eye stood behind a high desk and disposed of the articles which his assistants brought out from behind crimson hangings. Without the jokes or cajoleries of the traditional auctioneer he spoke impersonally, even languidly, as to connoisseurs too keen not to see for themselves the value of the things he presented. Objects appeared and disappeared with bewildering rapidity and an odd inconsequence of order. A

Sheraton cabinet was followed by a pair of Japanese swords, a Sèvres tea-service, some old Sheffield plate, and a George Inness landscape.

The bidding went on as by some mysterious mutual understanding, so swiftly and silently that Charlie Grace could follow it with neither eyes nor ears. As owner of an empty house, he would have been glad now and then to make an offer on his own account had he known how to get it in. But the man with the patch over one eye recited as in a litany: "Fifty—seventy-five—a hundred—a hundred and twenty-five—does any one say a hundred and fifty?—a hundred and thirty-five—fifty—three-quarters—does any one say two hundred?—two hundred—two hundred and a quarter—going at two hundred and a quarter—going—sold—to Mrs. H." The custom of naming habitués by initials was also puzzling—so puzzling that it came as a shock when, after the usual fluent and almost soundless rise in price, a pair of mezzotint portraits was announced as "going—going at a hundred and twenty—sold—to Mrs. Bright."

The lady in furs rose, glided forward to whisper a few words to a clerk who was taking notes or keeping accounts, and returned to her seat. Charlie Grace no longer had any doubt.

So she was *Mrs.* Bright! He smiled to himself. So many possibilities were sheltered behind that partial *nom de guerre* that they were both amusing and pathetic to dwell on. By dwelling on them, in fact, he lost the immediate succession of events, his attention being again aroused when four stalwart henchmen carried into view a library desk of elaborately carved oak. According to the catalogue

and the man with the patch over one eye, it had passed through the respective possessions of the Duke of Wellington and Mrs. Siddons. Each of its four carved doors was thrown open to expose the cupboards and the drawers within. It was turned round to show the elaborate Renaissance designs at either end. It was tipped sidewise, frankly, to reveal the fact that the green-baize covering would need renewal.

Charlie Grace could already see this masterpiece of the cabinet-maker's art as the center of the empty library in the Pavillon de Flore; but almost before he was aware of it the mysterious bidding had begun, gliding upward with mute and incredible speed. "Five hundred—five and a half—six hundred—does any one say six hundred and a half?—six and a quarter—six and a half—six hundred and seventy-five—does any one say seven?—seven hundred—seven and a quarter—seven hundred and fifty—seven hundred and fifty—belonged to the Duke of Wellington, gentlemen, and Mrs. Siddons—wonderful bit of modern Renaissance carving—seven hundred and fifty—seven hundred and fifty—does any one say seven and three-quarters—going at seven hundred and fifty—going—"

"Eight hundred," Charlie Grace shouted, desperately.

There was a startled turning of heads. He grew red with confusion. He had probably transgressed all the canons of auctioneering etiquette. But the man with the patch over one eye continued fluently: "Going at eight hundred—going—sold to—to Mr.—?"

"Mr. Grace." Then, as if the moment had come

at which to announce himself definitely to New York, he added: "Mr. Charles G. Grace, of the Hotel Waldorf and East Seventy-fifth Street." The attention accorded him by this gathering of dealers in antiques and amateurs of *objets d'art* gave significance to the proclamation of himself as a coming power.

Having handed in his check and made arrangements for the removal of his purchase, he found the lady spoken of as Mrs. Bright on the point of departure. He was able to open the door for her as she passed out and thus catch her eye. He noticed at once that it was the same soft, liquid eye as of yore, with the same oblique, mischievous regard.

"So you're Charlie Grace!" she exclaimed, when they were outside and had shaken hands. "I shouldn't have known you—or rather I *should* have known you, because I recognized you that night at the Blitz—did *you* know me? But my! how you've changed! Have I changed? But of course I have. Only I hope I don't look so much older than my age as you do. You can't be more than—let me see! —you can't be more than—"

"I'm thirty-one," he said, frankly, "and you must be about twenty-nine; although," he added, gallantly, "any one but an old friend like me—who doesn't forget—would say twenty-five at most."

A laugh displayed the beauty of her mouth and white, even teeth. "Well, my compliments must take another turn, because you easily look forty. Only it's becoming—though I can't be the first to tell you that. Whatever you've been doing all these years, it's agreed with you."

There was something about her that invited a

man's eyes to gaze deeply into hers. "And mayn't I say the same of you?"

She laughed again, with a becoming flush. "Oh, me! I don't count. Say, why can't you drive home with me and have a cup of tea?"

There was an instant too brief for measurement, but long enough in which to feel that if he accepted this invitation he might be a lost man. He was anxious not to be a more unmitigated rotter than he could help. By fumbling for his watch he tried to prelude a polite excuse, when she probed his reluctance with disconcerting frankness.

"Oh, you needn't be afraid. I sha'n't eat you."

He smiled feebly. "I'm sorry for that. It would have been a novel experience."

"I know you're married," she continued, as they crossed the pavement toward the brougham, "but I'm quite—" She seemed to search for the proper epithet. "I'm quite—correct," she concluded, with some emphasis.

"You don't think I question that?—with all this elegance."

The chauffeur held the door open for his mistress to enter. "Oh, come along," she insisted, getting in. "The Lord only knows when I shall see you again."

Feeling this reason to be conclusive, he got in. As he did so it seemed to him that Hilda's eyes followed him. Their golden gleam came suddenly out of space—solemn, reproachful. It took nothing from their appeal that they were mute, because Hilda's silences were always more eloquent than other people's words.

"I know you're married," Hattie Bright repeated, when he was seated by her side and they were gliding

up Fifth Avenue. "Reggie told me so—and I saw the announcement in the papers at the time. I'm married, too—or, rather, I was."

"I thought it was once married, always married."

"Well, it wasn't in my case."

"I noticed they spoke of you as Mrs. Bright."

"Well, yes; I do call myself that; it's more convenient."

"They say a man's name is what he chooses to call himself."

"Well, I choose to call myself that. In reality I'm—Mrs. Pillsbury."

He uttered a sympathetic "Oh!" so as not to be deficient in tact.

"Oh, I've had my ups and downs," she admitted, with a sigh.

He felt it permissible to say, "But they've been chiefly ups, haven't they?"

"That's as you happen to look at it. Let me see! When did I see you last? Oh, I remember. It was just before we left Tenth Street. Well, I married Mr. Pillsbury after that."

He felt it discreet to pass over a period which he knew must have intervened between the leaving Tenth Street and the marriage to Mr. Pillsbury, contenting himself with the remark, "I wonder I never heard of it."

"Oh, well, you wouldn't. We lived in quite a—a retired way. It wasn't really the marriage for me at all; but he was a good man—and well-to-do—a fish-dealer—and poor mother had to have a home, you see—and so—"

She allowed him to finish this part of her biography

for himself. After a brief silence he felt warranted in asking, "And is he dead?"

"I think he is. I've heard so—and one of these days I must find out. The fact is—there's no reason why I shouldn't tell you—you know the world—we were divorced."

He fell back again on a sympathetic, "Oh!"

"Yes, we were divorced; and now—there's no reason why I shouldn't tell you that, too—only confidentially—I'm engaged to Reggie Hornblower."

It seemed to him a long time before he was sufficiently master of himself to say, in a tone out of which he tried in vain to keep the irony, "Then I must offer you—my congratulations, mustn't I?"

She affected nonchalance by leaning slightly forward and inspecting the line of pedestrians on the pavement. "Well, he says he'll marry me," she protested, as though humiliated by his words.

"If so, I should jolly well keep him up to it."

"Oh, I mean to—the minute he gets back from Europe. He's in Europe now." Then, after reflection: "He's not so bad—Reggie isn't. He drinks too much—I suppose you know that. But he's awfully generous—and he's—he's fond of me."

"And you're fond of him, aren't you?"

"I could be—if he'd do what he said."

"You mean—marry you."

She nodded, silently, and the subject dropped.

On leaving Hattie Bright's apartment in the Hotel Doria, situated in one of the streets running into Riverside Drive, Charlie Grace again took occasion to call himself a rotter. Not that anything had been done or said or even hinted at to which a censor of

morals could have taken exception. As the lady herself had declared, she was quite correct—she was strikingly correct. In a tiny drawing-room of uncertain taste, heavy with the scent of flowers and overcrowded with questionable bric-à-brac, she had made tea with all the forms which accompany that ceremony amid the most choice surroundings. The conversation, too, was such as goes on between real ladies and gentlemen during this social hour of the afternoon, and dealt with literature, the stage, the Church, or whatever else was incidental to old memories. It was largely occupied, indeed, with such harmless domestic details as to how her mother had died and his father had done the same as were likely to come up at a meeting of friends of long standing.

And yet the young man had not descended in the lift as far as the street floor before he began calling himself by the opprobrious name which of late was so often on his lips. For Hattie he had not a word of blame. She was precisely what she had always been—beautiful, good-natured, a little common, above all, an *amoureuse*. He enjoyed the talk with her about old times, and, as a man with no prejudices, he sympathized with her difficult situation. If anything were to come of their meeting that would make him more intensely a rotter than he was as yet, it would be his fault rather than hers. And that something might come of it had been the *arrière pensée* of their intercourse. It needed no words—it needed not even so much as the exchange of involuntary, disturbing glances into which they were betrayed, apparently because they couldn't help it. It was in the situation. It was in the

traditions and conventions of the world into which they entered the minute they set off in the motor-brougham together. So long as they kept to that world they would run counter to no preconceptions and break no laws. It would be in going back to the other world—the every-day world—that trouble would come, as Charlie Grace was quick to foresee. He was a rotter, therefore, for getting himself into a position where such complications could obtain. He was a rotter because he had accepted an invitation to come back, on a day in the near future, and dine with her. He was a rotter above all because he was like a fly, who, knowing the dangers that beset fly-life, has let itself be caught within the outer convolutions of a cobweb.

All that evening, all that night, all the next day, he could see Hilda's golden-brown eyes gazing at him reproachfully. They seemed to be in the air and to meet him at every turn. He saw no features —only the eyes—luminous, haunting.

It was in a fever of propitiation to those eyes that during the next few days he threw himself into an ecstasy of buying for the new house. The carved oaken desk had been a point of departure. In the hours he was free from the office he frequented the merchants, who, after ransacking palaces, convents, and cathedrals for treasures, lined themselves along Fifth Avenue; and whatever Hilda would admire or enjoy he bought. Now it was a picture, now a rug, now a carved chest, now a pair of vases, and now a set of chairs. He bought, it is true, for the pleasure of buying, for the satisfaction the home-builder gets in preparing a nest for his mate; but he bought chiefly as a Greek might heap flowers on the shrine

of Pallas before offering a dove to Aphrodite. When the date of the dinner in the flat near the Riverside Drive had come round the larger rooms of the Pavillon de Flore were not without a resemblance to the art and auction gallery which had given Charlie Grace his inspiration. He found the general effect tasteful—and rich.

It must be admitted that he bought, too, because the money he couldn't spend on the memorial to his father was burning in his pocket. It was burning in his pocket because there was something burning in his heart. He admitted as much as that to Esther Legrand, whom he met one day while making a duty-call on Miss Smedley. She had come in on some errand that had to do with altar-linen, and he managed to slip out with her when she went away.

"You know it's all up with my plan about the parish-house," he said, as he walked slowly beside her along the crowded pavement of Vandiver Place.

She looked at him with misty violet eyes. A light flush, which might have been caused by the honor of his company, threw into relief a few small primrose-tinted freckles he had never noticed by the tempered light of indoors.

"*No!*" The brief response was full of incredulous protest.

"It is, though. Your father won't have it. Says I'm not good enough to build it."

"Oh, but you are!"

Her conviction made him smile. "It's very kind of you to think so; but I can't agree with you."

"Oh, nobody *knows* whether he's good or not. Even father doesn't. Any one else can see that he's

a saint; but you couldn't make him believe it about himself."

"I guess," Charlie Grace said, dryly, "I could believe it about *my*self—if it was true."

"Oh no, you couldn't. You wouldn't be a saint if you could. I don't attach any importance to what *you* feel at all."

"But if your father feels so—?"

She sobered. "If father feels so—then you must have led him into some mistake."

He shook his head, smiling with a dim, wry smile. "Oh no, I haven't."

She stopped, confronting him, heedless of the passers-by. "But you're the best man I know—*except* father—and he's quite another style."

"Oh, quite."

"Well, then?"

"Well, then—nothing." He threw out his hands with a little gesture. "Only one other woman in the world ever made your mistake about me—and she died about the time you were born."

Her brows contracted into a frown of perplexity. "I don't understand you—"

"Happily for you."

"It isn't happily for me, because I like to understand people—and—and—help them." She added, shyly: "I can, you know."

"Oh, I know that well enough. You could help *me*—if everything was different from what it is, as I once heard you say."

They had walked on for a few minutes in silence when she stopped again. "If you're *not* good—" she began, falteringly.

"Well? What then?"

"Why, I know plenty of people—plenty of men—who aren't. Of course I do. I'm seeing them every day. They're not gentlemen like you—nor Americans—generally, that is—but I suppose—"

He helped her out. "That human nature is much the same whatever the class or the nationality."

"Yes; that's what I mean. And I know—" She colored, but went on bravely. "I know the sort of things that *make* them not good—I *have* to—if I didn't I couldn't help the wives and children—or talk to the men themselves—"

"Oh, you talk to the men themselves, do you?"

"You see, I must. Mother doesn't want me to, and father doesn't like it very much—or, rather, he doesn't know—I don't tell him, because he might think it— But, you see, I *must*. You can't do anything else when you live among all the things we live among—and they do listen—some of them."

He was thinking of her more than of himself, as, gazing deeply into her eyes, he said: "But you couldn't talk to me—because I don't accept the grounds on which you appeal to them."

She spoke quite simply. "Do you mean—about Jesus?"

He nodded, smiling to himself at her directness.

"Oh, don't say that," she pleaded, "because—well, because it's the beginning of it all."

"Exactly. So that with me you'd have no starting-point."

They walked on again. Presently she turned to him with one of her bright smiles. "But I know you're all wrong. I *know* you're a good man—the best man in the world—except father."

"I couldn't be even the second best man in the world—but with some one to believe in me as you do, I might have been better than I am."

"Then you have some one. You have me."

He muttered under his breath: "But you've come too late."

At the door of St. David's they found Remnant, wearing his beadle's gown in honor of the approaching five-o'clock service.

"Well, well, now," he exclaimed, as the long-extinguished twinkle came back into his little eyes. "It's as auxilarating to me, Mr. Charlie, to see you and Miss Esther together as a taste o' sperrits. Seems as if you was two children, like, and I'd brought you both up. I *have* brought you up, in a manner of speaking—especially you, Mr. Charlie. And how is the other young lady—Mrs. Grace, that is? Not but what she's a nice young lady, too," he added, with compunction.

Esther said good-by, going into the church to play the organ for the afternoon service.

"She's an angel, if there ever *was* one—Miss Esther is," Remnant declared, when the friends were alone. "If religion was all like her it 'u'd be another thing."

"I guess that's right, Remnant," Charlie Grace agreed.

The old man took on a ruminating air. "I've often thought, Mr. Charlie, how pleasant it 'u'd have been if you and her—" He broke off to add: "Not but what you may have got a nice young lady, as it is. I'm sure I hope so. I don't say contrary to it—not a bit. Only Miss Esther—well, there's no two ways about it—she's a' angel."

It was more than a relief to Charlie Grace that the dinner that evening at the Hotel Doria was without other than pleasant incidents. It was, moreover, an excellent dinner, accompanied by an excellent champagne and the cigars of a connoisseur. It was evident that Hattie Bright had studied the art of making a man comfortable, even to the chair he sat in. Her conversation, too, was of the kind that a man with a good cigar could settle himself to enjoy. It was free and racy, without being improper—at least, it was not improper so long as it was confidential and tête-à-tête. There was humor in it, and naïveté, and pathos, and a vast store of amusing personal anecdote. Charlie Grace learned the startling inner history of many old friends and acquaintances whose lives he had hitherto supposed to be passably correct. It was wonderful how much alike people were when you really got at them. Except that some were more careful of appearances than others, there was not much difference between good and bad. Being a man who knew the world, as Hattie Bright was fond of telling him, he could take the information she imparted in the purely laughable spirit in which one follows the revelations made in a Palais Royal farce.

Dressed simply in white, with no ornament but a string of pearls which might have been artificial, Hattie herself was very lovely. Passing lightly from her own sorrows, over which she shed real tears, to some rollicking fact in the absolutely private life of Freddy Furnival—whose outer career was of the sedateness essential to a man rapidly making a reputation for himself in the higher walks of medicine—she displayed an artlessness that dis-

armed suspicion. That is, it disarmed suspicion of design. Charlie Grace was persuaded that if "anything were to come" of his visits to the Hotel Doria —he used the formula again—it would be by accident.

Nothing coming of his second visit, he had the less hesitation in making a third. Nothing coming of the third, he accepted an invitation to a fourth. The dinners continued to be excellent. He didn't know what to do with his evenings. He was lonely. Hattie was lonely, too.

"It's all very well for Reggie," she complained. "He can go and come as he likes—and always expects to find me here. He won't let me know a soul. Not that I want to. I could if I liked, of course. But you know the world. If we're married—I mean, *when* we're married—I don't want to be bothered with a lot of embarrassing acquaintances. That's one reason why I haven't gone on the stage. I could if I liked, of course. But I'd only have to drop them—and I always hate dropping any one who's been a real friend. Of course, I've had to now and then—but it always makes me feel mean. So I'm very lonely, Charlie." She dashed away a tear with a plump, bejeweled hand. "You don't know how much good it does me to see an old friend like you. You've always been so nice. So do come on Thursday. You can see for yourself that—I'm harmless."

But on Thursday there was a change in the atmosphere. Hattie herself was pensive. She was also sumptuously dressed. The dinner was even better than usual, while orchids on the table produced an effect of prodigal display. His thoughts wandered

to old Silas Hornblower, who had refused a few dollars to save from starvation the woman who was now unconsciously taking her revenge by spending his money royally. He smiled to himself at that. It was an exceptionally apt touch on the part of poetic justice.

He, too, was pensive. The little flat was overheated and stifling. In consequence he drank more than his ordinary, temperate measure of champagne. The drawing-room was heavy with the scent of flowers—and other scents, exotic and indefinable. They smoked silently. It was the first occasion on which he had seen Hattie herself take a cigarette. He spoke of it.

"I never do," she smiled, languidly, "except when I'm in—certain moods."

"What moods?"

She made no answer, but their eyes met.

Their eyes met with that disturbing glance, lingering and yet furtive, which alarmed him. He looked away, but only to become the more conscious that she did not. He fastened his gaze now on this object, now on that, in order not to see that her gaze was fastened on him. He felt stupid, foolish, drunk with something more than wine. He tried violently to think of Hilda; he appealed desperately to Esther Legrand; but both had withdrawn into the realm of unrealities. The only things real and vivid were in this room, with its heat and its flowers, and its sumptuous woman, with her profound, Circe-like stare.

It was nearly eleven when he tore himself out of the drowsy spell to say good night.

She sat still. "Oh, don't go."

"I'm afraid I must. I've been working hard all day." He pulled out his watch. "It's getting late."

"Oh no, it isn't. Do sit down. Have you seen these?"

She sprang up and came forward to the fireplace beside which he was standing. They were close together.

She took into her hands one of a pair of scale-blue Worcester vases that adorned the ends of the mantelpiece. "I bought them to-day—at the Art and Auction Gallery. Regular bargain. I'm sure they're genuine. Feel their glaze."

He drew back. "It's no use my doing that," he laughed, nervously. "I don't know anything about such things."

"Just feel it," she insisted, taking the tips of his fingers, and running them up and down the painted surface. "So smooth and creamy, isn't it? That's how you can tell. I want to show you something else I picked up to-day. A little bit of Sèvres. It's in the dining-room. Sit down. I'll fetch it. No, come in. Come into the dining-room. I'll turn on a light." She pushed aside the portières, and passed beyond them. "Come," she called, softly.

Through the clamor of his senses he kept his head sufficiently to hear the two Voices within himself. The one said:

"If you go in there you're done for."

The other:

"Hilda won't suspect you any the less if you stay, or any the more if you go. So why not—go?"

He went. As he entered the room only the low-hanging central light was burning, illumining the

orchids on the table. In the dimness of a corner she was standing by the door of a cabinet she had opened. She stood facing him, awaiting him, a small white object in her hands. From its rounded surfaces the hanging lamp struck pale, pearly reflections. But as he stalked forward he saw nothing but the welcome on her lips and the shining in her eyes.

CHAPTER XI

ON the following day, as Charlie Grace was leaving the building in lower Broadway in which the Buffalo & New London had its offices, he heard his name.

"Hello, Grace!"

The voice was surly. The man from whom it came was hollow-cheeked and hollow-eyed. Neither his hat nor his overcoat was in its first freshness, and he stood out of the crowd that hurried between the street-door and the lifts like one who has been thrust aside. To himself Charlie Grace said "Damn!" but he too stepped out of the current and came to a halt.

"Hello, Ellis!" For the minute it seemed all there was to say till he forced himself to add, in a tone he tried to make friendly: "What you doing here? Heard you were ill. Hope you're better. Suppose you are, or you wouldn't be about."

There was a muttered, inarticulate reply, after which, with an airy, casual, "Well, so long!" Charlie Grace moved on.

He was too uneasy to be glad of making his escape. Ellis would be the first to remember that the B. & N. L. offices were in that building, and to put two and two together. The very errand on which he, Charlie Grace, was in New York was commonly reported among people interested in the T.-C. R. to

be of Ellis's conception. Then there was Hilda. He had additional reasons for being sensitive with regard to Hilda, and it was possible that here was a chance of doing something that would please her. He turned back. Ellis was still watching the hurrying throng go by.

Charlie Grace tried to make his tone even more amical. "Look here, old chap; I wonder if there's anything I can do for you?"

The hollow eyes looked up. Even the sagging mustache seemed to bristle. "Do for me?"

The light in Ellis's face might have been one of gratitude. It was difficult to tell. The would-be benefactor nodded.

"Do for me?" Ellis repeated. "You've done for me, damn you! And, by God! I'll do for you."

The sullen voice grew so loud that the attention of the passers-by was attracted. In order to keep his sang-froid Charlie Grace took on the air of a kindly fellow trying to deal with a refractory friend.

"I say, old chap—" he protested, laying his hand on Ellis's shoulder.

But Ellis jumped aside. "Don't touch me, you damned thief," he screamed.

"Come and see the fun," one telegraph-boy yelled to another. A little crowd collected.

Ellis seized the opportunity to point a bony white finger, and shout: "That's Charles G. Grace, who's putting through a damned sly job between the Trans-Canadian and the Buffalo & New London—but he hasn't been damned sly enough for me. I've dogged him like a sleuth. Look at him. Don't forget his name. Every one will know him soon as the damnedest hound unhung."

For the sake of the onlookers Charlie Grace still maintained his coolness. "'Sh! 'sh! old boy. Let me get a cab and take you home. No? Well, some one ought to do it." He turned to those who stood nearest him. "He won't let *me*—but he ought to be got home or to a hospital. His name is Ellis, and he lives in Brooklyn, I think—though I'm not very sure. Used to know him in the Northwest. Good chap till he went this way."

So he got out of the building into the stream of Broadway without undue loss of dignity. The sense of loss was within. There the collapse of his self-assurance, of his self-respect, was such that no Dutch courage of inward cursing could brace him up against it. His self-respect, indeed, had been gone since the preceding night; but that was something with which he didn't immediately have to deal. It was degrading to have had an encounter with Ellis in a public place, before twenty witnesses at least, but even that could be brushed aside as an annoying detail. The menace was in Ellis's knowledge of a mission to which, in its present stage, secrecy was the first element of success. That was terrifying. It might be no more on Ellis's part than guesswork leading to a bluff; it might be only the ravings of a man maddened to desperation; but either possibility was dangerous.

It was not that Charlie Grace had the thing itself so much at heart, though he could see how—in case "the deal were put through"—he should be able to "play the market" to advantage. What he had at heart was the effect of the issue on himself. It was the most important task with which he had as yet been intrusted. Success would place him among

men recognized as able in this branch of affairs. Failure might not ruin him, but it would certainly put him back ten years, even if it didn't thrust him forever into the mass of the useful second rate. It would be curious if Ellis, of all men, should become the instrument of this doom. Hilda would say it was the working out of a natural consequence; but he had seen too much of injury inflicted and never avenged to believe in any such law as that. There had been a warning current when he was a boy—was it from the Bible?—"Be sure your sin will find you out"; but it was a matter of the commonest experience that your sin didn't find you out—that it could remain through life as secret as the impulse that committed it. From any such Nemesis as that he could reasonably count on immunity; but he was afraid of Ellis, none the less.

Among the letters waiting him at the offices of the Trans-Canadian was one from Hilda. He thrust it into his pocket. It was his custom to read her letters before any others; but this morning he couldn't do so. Sickening recollections of the previous night combined with the incident with Ellis to turn Hilda into an upbraiding spirit, from whose presence he shrank. Before he could look at her words he reported to Mr. Purvis, consulted with his colleagues, and dictated to his stenographer. By following his accustomed routine he got back something of his nerve. When he felt that he dared, he withdrew into the little room allotted to his private use, and broke Hilda's seal.

Her letter began with details of the domestic round at home. It told of drives and calls and Emma's kindnesses. Then its tone changed suddenly. She continued:

Dearest Charlie, I am not very well. I am not as well as I ought to be. I have a feeling—you will think me fanciful—that I am not going to live through it—that I shall die—that I may die even before you come home. You say in your last letter that it will not be long now before you return—but long and short are words of which I seem to have lost the meaning. Even now I feel that you have been away so long as to have become to me something like a dream. Oh, Charlie, I never should have married you. We've both made a mistake. I see that now so plainly. I am not the sort of woman who could ever make you happy, and yet I have not the capacity to adapt myself. I could die for you—I sometimes hope I *shall* die for you—but I shall never be able to make the slight changes, the small concessions to your standards, you would like. You and I are so different—and each so incapable of crossing the gulf that separates us from each other. But what I want to say now is this—that if I do go you must marry some one whom you can truly love. It won't be enough to respect her. No woman was ever satisfied with respect. I know you have respected me, and if you haven't done more, dear Charlie, it is not your fault. You mustn't blame yourself. I am not the type of woman to call forth the thing essential. I lack something. I don't know what it is, but whatever it is, I lack it. I knew that before I married you. Knowing that, I should *not* have married you. I knew it was wrong at the time—but so many other considerations came up that I allowed my better judgment to be overruled. I think the situation will right itself now; and if it does I want you to remember that I shall be glad of it—because it will be a way of making you some amends.

There was more to the same purport, but he couldn't read it all at once. His eyes smarted. Something in his breathing, too, came hardly and

spasmodically. He crumpled the pages up, and thrust them back into his pocket.

"If we've made a mistake," he muttered to himself, "and I suppose we have, she shouldn't be the one to suffer. It ought to be me. And I *am* suffering. My God, how I'm suffering! I'm suffering from—" He tried to be analytical, and for once he succeeded. "I'm suffering from a sense of—inner disgrace."

That was it. He was defiled within. Something that was of the very essence of his nature was besmirched. His immediate longing was to be able to plunge into some sort of moral bath—some baptism that would wash away what was otherwise indelible. There being no such fount, he could only sit down to the realization of his vileness.

"My God, what a mess I've made of it!"

He was not sure of the actual cause of his remorse. It couldn't be his disloyalty to Hilda, because—well, because in the back of his mind he had always expected to be faithless to her some time, and now the time had come. Neither could it be his responsibility for Ellis's break-up, for the reason that Ellis should have taken care of himself. Neither was it this thing nor that thing nor another thing, for which a sentimental conscience might have twinges. He examined the charges categorically, acquitting himself of each in turn.

"It's the whole thing," he groaned, at last. "It's —*me*."

He got up and walked about. It was a handsome little room, belonging to a man named Stearns—now abroad—with a pretty taste in office furnishings. There were two or three good chairs scattered about,

some original racing prints on the walls, and an old Constitution mirror, in which, as he passed, Charlie Grace got a glimpse of himself at full length. There was no denying it, he was a good-looking fellow. He was even an attractive fellow. He had his father's fine, strong features, tempered by his mother's softnesses. If the mouth, with its thin, drooping lips, was stern, it was not unsympathetic, while all the rest of the face suggested good-natured kindliness.

And yet, within, he was what he was. That was the curious part of it. What a ridiculous theory it always proved to be that you could judge people by their faces! Any one who judged *him* by his face would call him a fine, clean, strapping chap, incapable of a base action or an ignoble thought. What whited sepulchers people were! There was that aspect of the matter, too. He was not the only one. He had but to recall some of the confidential anecdotes told by Hattie Bright—and not by Hattie Bright alone, poor soul!—to realize how few there were who lived up to their reputations. There was some comfort in that. There was, in fact, a good deal of comfort in it. Leaving women out of the question, it was beyond cavil that all *men* had the beast in them—the beast of prey. Who was he to be better than others? He might be in the gutter—but he wasn't there alone.

Taking heart of grace from these reflections, he sent a telegram to Emma begging of news of Hilda's health, after which he went again to see Mr. Purvis. He argued that matters with the B. & N. L. were now at a point at which, for the present, they had better be left alone. The T.-C. R., having made all

the advances, could reasonably wait for something to come from the other side. Too great eagerness might defeat its own ends.

Mr. Purvis being of this opinion, and perhaps not unwilling to get rid of a young man generally looked upon as his heir presumptive in office, it was agreed that Charlie Grace might reasonably, for a while at any rate, return to the West. The decision came in the nick of time, for before his telegram could have reached Emma, one arrived from her.

Healthy boy born last night, two months earlier than expected. Hilda weak, but not in danger. Come as soon as you conveniently can.

Before leaving for home he took the time to send a dozen Chinese plates, which Heiligmann the expert had persuaded him to buy for the new house, to Hattie Bright.

"Poor little rat!"

Charlie Grace uttered these words half aloud, as, four days later, he sat by a crib all ribbons and lace and downy stuff, and peered for the first time at his child. He sat on a small wooden chair, his body bent forward, one foot thrust out, the other backward, his arm across his knee, in a position denoting eagerness.

It denoted curiosity, too—curiosity mingled with sympathy. In his present state of mind sympathy dominated. He was sorry for the wee mite, whose puckered, frowning little face seemed even as he slept to forebode trouble. For was he not a Grace? —of the same blood and passions and weaknesses as his father. Life could be no great gift to one who

came trailing clouds of inherited taint, from Charlie Grace himself, and from the rector of St. David's beyond him, and from the carpenter beyond the rector of St. David's, and from the common laborer beyond the carpenter, and from the Lord only knew what beyond the common laborer. It was almost like the propagation of sorrow to bring the poor little creature into the world. Charlie Grace had heard somewhere of a doctrine of original sin, and, though he didn't know what it meant, he was sure it must be founded in truth, since all men—again to leave women out of the question—were conceived and born in sin, and could never outlive the birthright. Even so innocent a thing as this couldn't escape it. Charlie Grace could look back to a time when his own soul was almost as undefiled as that of this sleeping infant; and now he was—what he had become. Where, then, was the good of life? It wasn't as if you could dodge the universal destiny. You might twist and double never so swiftly, but you ran into it at last—the infinite slough, in which you could do nothing but wallow.

Stooping more closely, he pulled away, carefully, tenderly, an inch or two of the downy covering from the little form. A tiny fist closed round his finger with tight, prehensile grasp. A thrill passed through the man's frame at the touch—a thrill not so much of joy or of pain as of awe. It was as if he felt the next generation swinging itself off the ancestral tree into futurity. It was but a short time ago that he had so swung himself off from the rector of St. David's, and not so long since the rector of St. David's had swung himself away from the carpenter. Still briefer would seem the years before a new genera-

tion still would be springing from the wizened epitome of the human race snuggled in this cradle, and he, Charlie Grace, would be thrust a row farther back. Then it would be a row farther back still, and then a row farther back still, till to some Charlie Grace walking before long in Broadway he would be as dim as the carpenter and the common laborer were to him. Where were they now?—the carpenter and the common laborer. Where was the rector of St. David's? Wherever they were, it was where he himself should be when this child's children were sinning and suffering as he was sinning and suffering in the year of Christ 1901.

There was nothing novel in these reflections unless it were in the degree to which they robbed sinning and suffering of such value as they had by making them fleeting. Even the wrecking of Ellis and the lapse with Hattie Bright, which loomed largest on his mental horizon for the moment, became trivial incidents in a life so essentially futile. There were plenty of such happenings, and worse, in the long line stretched out behind him; there would be more to come. This very child would grow up and become guilty of them, and his children after him. It wasn't sacrilegious to predict it; it was only common sense. If, therefore, he, Charlie Grace, had brought back to his wife the burden of a worried conscience, it was really not worth while. Such offenses as his had been committed myriads of times, and would be committed myriads of times again. Her own father had probably committed them; her own son would do the same. Best be cool about it, then, and stoical, remembering that a drop more or less in the sea was a negligible quantity.

So, coolly and stoically he carried himself throughout that spring and summer while Hilda regained her strength, and married life resumed its normal course. The very normality of the course tranquilized matters, and kept them from growing tragic. From Hilda came no repetition of the statements she had made in the letter written before the baby's birth, and from Charlie Grace no reference to the fact that he had ever read them. If her words had left any impression behind them it was in the tacit assumption on both their parts—or what he took to be on both their parts—that since ideal marriages do not exist outside the pages of romance, one could only make the best of the marriage one had let oneself in for. He used the expression of himself. He didn't blame Hilda. He had "let himself in for" the situation in which they found themselves. Hilda had warned him in advance that what they felt for each other wasn't love. She had been more skilled in her analysis than he—probably because she was a woman. He, poor blundering chap, hadn't known the difference between love and intense admiration. He *had* admired Hilda intensely; he admired her so still; but, as she had put it in her letter, that wasn't the thing essential. He saw that now.

And she saw it, too. The real tragedy lay there. As far as he alone was concerned he could have jogged along in a loveless marriage—or a marriage infused with only a stinted degree of love—somehow. But it was more difficult doing it for both. If Hilda had only loved him he was sure he could have successfully concealed from her the fact that he had made a mistake on his part. But she had frankly

admitted that "other considerations" had overruled her better judgment, leading to regrets of her own. From the thought of the "other considerations" his mind turned away in delicacy and pity. Motherless, homeless, moneyless, what else could a girl do but turn to the man who was urging her to let him take care of her? A woman was naturally parasitic. She couldn't help being so. He disliked the woman who wasn't so. He no more reproached Hilda for having made him serve her purpose in this respect than he grudged the dozen Chinese plates to Hattie Bright.

But the normal course of life kept things smooth by the very force of its normality. There was a spell in rising each day to well-served meals and simple, dignified ways of living. The decorum of the household under Hilda's management subordinated even its master to the system of the whole, as the discipline of an army controls the general. Charlie Grace was himself too practised in the art of organization not to perceive this, and to admire his wife for it the more. If, he argued, she could accomplish so much with Osborne's relatively modest establishment on Lake Superior, what would she not do with the rich resources of the Pavillon de Flore?

As to that elegant residence, he found himself curiously timid in breaking the news to her. For one thing, his departure from New York had been so hurried that he hadn't brought the photographs on which he relied for convincing her; he hadn't even had them taken. For another thing, more than a fortnight passed before Hilda was able to discuss such matters at all, and by that time his own enthusiasm had cooled down. For a third thing,

women were peculiar about domestic concerns, and had an absurd idea that men knew nothing about them. Now that Hilda was on her feet again, he could see more clearly than he had realized as yet that she was the kind of born mistress of the house who would have decided opinions as to the details under her direction. He had no doubt about her liking the Pavillon de Flore once she saw it—who could help liking a thing that, as he said to himself, so clearly "looked its price"?—he only feared that were he to tell her too abruptly that this beautiful home was hers, she might think he had ignored her rights in her own domain.

There was one other consideration—one that he felt without being able, without being willing perhaps, to put it into words. It was difficult to tell Hilda about the Pavillon de Flore for the reason that in his memory the house was connected with two other women more closely than with her. Indirectly, it was through Esther Legrand that he had acquired it; through Hattie Bright that he had partially furnished it. The shadows of these two—now one and now the other—seemed to get between Hilda and him every time he tried to bring the subject up.

Nevertheless, there came a day in which he forced the topic boldly.

"There's a house I should like you to look at in East Seventy-fifth Street."

They had been talking of houses—or rather, he had been doing so—and of the best part of New York in which to live.

"Very well. Have you seen it yourself?"

"I've—I've gone over it."

"If you like it—"

"I did like it—immensely."

"Then I should probably like it, too. Don't you think his nose is really a little bigger? It's so like a grain of Indian corn. Don't you think it's like a grain of Indian corn?"

Having answered this question in the affirmative a good many times during the past three months, Charlie Grace felt justified in regarding it now as intrusive. While Hilda kissed the grain of Indian corn he himself puffed silently at his cigar as he followed with his eyes the course of an ore-boat—a long black streak on the water, with the funnel at the stern—rounding the curve coming down from the Canadian shore. They sat on the veranda at the head of the green lawn, which sloped down to the lake through clumps of white and red roses.

"It's what they call a little François Premier *hôtel*," he said, when he judged it judicious to go on with the theme.

Hilda raised her head from contemplating the baby. "What is? Oh, the house you were speaking of. Isn't that rather artificial in New York?"

"I don't think so. They're very Frenchy in their taste—in the streets up there."

"Oh, I know they are. But doesn't it seem to you rather ridiculous? French architecture belongs so essentially to the soil of France. Transplanted to New York it's as incongruous as a man wearing a papal tiara would be in Wall Street. Does he want to kick his little feet, then, the darling?"

Charlie Grace could only say, with what he hoped was confidence: "Well, wait and see."

So Hilda waited and saw. She waited through

the summer, and saw on a morning late in October, when they had been twenty-four hours in the hotel in New York. Her husband had curbed his impatience to take her to the new house on the first day, fearing the fatigue incidental to the long journey might render her out of sorts, and adverse in her opinion. After the conversation on the veranda at Minnesaba he had come to the conclusion that it would be diplomatic on his part to let the selection *seem* to come from her. He was canny, too. He purposely took her to two or three houses which he knew in advance would displease her before ordering the cabman to drive to the Pavillon de Flore.

"This is the one I spoke of," he tried to say casually. "Shall we go in? Or are you too tired?"

"I *am* tired; but since we're here we might as well go in." She glanced up at the façade. "*C'est gentil*," she admitted.

They entered. She looked round the hall critically. Charlie Grace's heart was thumping. He loved this house, and was proud of it.

"There seem to be things in it," Hilda said.

"There—there are," he admitted. "In fact, it's—it's partly furnished."

"They wouldn't expect us to take the furniture, I suppose."

"Not unless you liked it," he found himself able to say.

"We shouldn't want that."

She pointed with her parasol to a marble hall table, with carved griffins as legs. He had bought it at the Art and Auction Gallery, feeling sure of the good taste of his purchase, since there was a precisely similar table in the Waldorf. He hastened,

however, to agree with her. "No; we shouldn't want that."

They passed into the dining-room. Again she looked about her silently.

"It isn't a bad room," she remarked at last; "but—how funny!"

"What's funny?" he questioned, timorously.

"Well, these things—this heavy Jacobean table and these gimcrack Chippendale chairs. The table is a good one — for a baronial hall or a monks' refectory—but the chairs are cheap modern reproductions. They must have been awfully queer people who lived here."

He would have told her that no one had lived there as yet had she not crossed the room to examine the butler's pantry and its connection with the kitchen. "This is awful," he heard her say.

In reply to another timid inquiry on his part she explained the details in which the awfulness lay. It lay in the situation of the kitchen, in the distance of the kitchen from the pantry, in the distance of the pantry from the dining-room, in the impossibility of keeping dishes hot in traversing such spaces, in the number of steps for the servants, and in much more that seemed to him irrelevant and hypercritical.

They went up-stairs. He pointed out the fine sweep of the balustrade while she remarked that the stair itself was fatiguing. She acknowledged that the drawing-room and library were good, "but," she added, "I never *saw* such a house. It's like a shop. No two things in it go together. Some of the things are good, and others are trash. I can't imagine what sort of person could have collected them."

He had himself sufficiently in hand to say, "We could get rid of the stuff, so long as you like the *house*."

They went up the second flight of stairs. Here there was little in the way of Charlie Grace's purchases, so that the inspection was soon made.

"Is this all?" Hilda asked, when they had passed through the bedrooms.

"There are the servants' rooms in the attic. Should you like to see them?"

She answered, decisively: "No; because this house won't do."

Perhaps his crestfallen look betrayed him, though not immediately. "Won't do? Why won't it do?"

She laughed. "Why, just see! There's that room for you, and that one for me, and that one for baby. Not another spot on this floor."

"But isn't that enough?"

"Where's the day-nursery?—and the guestroom?—or a bit of extra space anywhere? There's nowhere to *live*—or to put anything. And baby's room wouldn't get a ray of sun." She turned to go down the stairs. "I can't imagine," she continued, in descending, "who could have wanted such a house in the first place. For mercy's sake, who *does* it belong to?"

He pretended to be looking at something on the stairs and to be speaking absently as he said, "It belongs to a man who bought it . . . because he thought his wife . . . would like it. . . . But she didn't . . . which is the reason why . . . it's for sale . . . again."

"I can understand that," she said, reaching the drawing-room floor and looking about her the

second time. "No," she went on, with conviction; "it's just as I said. There's nowhere to live. There's not a spot in the whole house where you can fancy yourself sitting down."

About ten o'clock that night Charlie Grace came back to the hotel from walking in the dusty coolness of Fifth Avenue. He had gone out not merely to get the air, but to produce something like order in his thoughts. He wanted to detach Hilda from the foolish business of the house, and frankly to own that it was a matter in which he had been stupid. To reach this conclusion was no easy thing; for he still believed the house to be a beautiful house, full of beautiful things. It was inconceivable to him that Hilda couldn't see it. He could only attribute her dwelling on such trifles as the kitchen arrangements and the lack of sunshine, and ignoring the fact that no one could enter that house without thinking it had cost twice its value, to the circumstance of her being a woman. Who would ever know that the servants had to walk half a mile, as Hilda said, in her exaggerated woman's way, every time they conveyed a slice of toast to the breakfast-table? And as for sunshine in the baby's room, how was a mite like that to care whether he had sunshine in his room or not? Then there was this talk of things not going together!—of Jacobean tables and Chippendale chairs!—as if any one would ever notice that! A chair was a chair and a table was a table. If you had them handsome and strong and expensive, who was to ask whether they came from baronial halls or Grand Rapids, Michigan? That was the worst of living so long in Europe, as well as of being a

woman, that you got finicky over trifles while you ignored the essential.

Hilda had stabbed him in his little vanities, she had wounded him in his pride as the builder of a home, and yet, as the day wore on to evening, he tried to do her justice. The situation was one of his own making. He had been crass about it from the first. Without being driven to confess that his judgment had been vitally defective, he could see that he had bungled the whole thing and led Hilda into a trap. It was a trap in which he himself was taken in all sorts of ways; but that was not her fault. In the first phase of his annoyance he had declared to himself that it *was* her fault—that she was perversely slighting his taste; but he had been obliged to revise so hasty an opinion as that. The truth was that his taste was good enough; only between his likings and Hilda's there were radical and irreconcilable differences. It was one more indication of their common mistake in thinking they could live together.

And yet they *must* live together. There was no question as to that. They must live together, and he must make such concessions—without saying anything about it—as would make life not only tolerable, but as nearly happy as might be. He came back to the hotel with the intention of telling Hilda that perhaps, with the aid of her friend Mrs. Meredith, she might be able to find a house to suit herself. If so, he would subscribe to her choice, whatever the style or the situation, of their future home. That would mean, on his part, an act of mental abdication.

On entering the sitting-room he found her in her

favorite corner overlooking the crossing of Fifth Avenue and Thirty-third Street, with a view of the long lines of lights. It was the suite of rooms they had occupied on their last visit to New York, enlarged now so as to take in the baby. Only the green-shaded lamp was lighted. The window beside which Hilda sat was open, the curtains blowing gently in the night breeze.

He had scarcely taken off his hat when Hilda said, "Charlie, was the man who bought that house because he thought his wife would like it you?"

He stood dumbfounded, just inside the door, his hat still in his hand. "Why on earth should you think that?" he managed to say at last.

"Oh, for all sorts of reasons—little things I noticed without thinking of them at the time—and other things—since then. I've been going all over them—and putting them together—and things you hinted at as long ago as in the summer—in the West."

He tried to laugh. "And you've come to this wonderful conclusion? All I can say, dear, is that you'd better try again."

Throwing his hat on a sofa, he went toward his bedroom door, but she called him. "Don't go away, Charlie. Come here. Sit down. Let us talk."

He threw himself comfortably on the window-seat, where the wind blew through his hair. "I was just going to tell you," he began, "that if you could get Mrs. Meredith to help you find a house—"

"No; let *me* speak. If you *have* bought that house, Charlie, thinking I might like it—I do like it."

He was too sore at heart to accept this magnanim-

ity. "I'm sorry for that, because we're not going to live in it. You're to have the house that suits you, and no other."

"But the house that suits me better than any other is the one you've selected. It must suit me better than any other for the very reason that you've selected it. Don't you see that?"

"H'm! I can't say that I do. This morning you—"

"Don't you think that this morning you took me at a rather unfair advantage?—perhaps a rather unkind advantage?"

"I didn't mean it to be unkind, or unfair, either. I wanted you to express yourself frankly—"

"I still don't think it was the way to make me do it. But since I've done it, I want you to see that all such judgments as that must be necessarily superficial. If you've really bought the house—"

"I've not said so."

"No; but if you have, I can see how we could make it do. I've been going over the accommodations—"

"But I don't want you to have a house that will only—do. I want you—"

"Isn't it our first duty to be sensible? If you've bought this house you've probably spent a lot of money on it—money that we shouldn't throw away. We ought to live in it—and make the best of it."

"Oh, I could get rid of it."

She ignored the admission contained in these words, going on to say: "You couldn't get rid of it very easily. It was probably in the market a good while before you took it."

He admitted that this was so.

"It's a man's house," she went on. "A man must have planned it and furnished it. No woman would have been satisfied with two or three great big inconvenient rooms—and nothing else. No woman could have filled them with such an extraordinary lot of odds and ends, either." It must have been the look in his eyes that startled her, for she exclaimed at once: "Oh, Charlie! You didn't do that, too, did you?"

He raised himself from his lounging position, thrust his hands into his trousers pockets, stretched out his legs, and laughed. Perhaps he laughed a little too loudly, being determined to make a clean breast of the thing once for all. "You've struck it. I'm the culprit. I got most of the things as bargains at Henderson's Art and Auction Gallery. You needn't hesitate to sweep the lot of 'em out."

There was a long silence. "Oh, there'll be no need of that," she said, with forced assurance. "We can make *them* do, too—or most of them—since they're your choice. It will only need a little —contrivance. And as for the rooms, a good architect could remedy most of the trouble, and probably give us a little more space."

He began to take courage. "Oh, Coningsby said we should have to make some alteration. I allowed for that."

He thought she straightened herself. "Who said so?"

"A young fellow named Coningsby — chap you don't know. I really got hold of the place through him. He had the disposal of it, and—"

"And you took it off his hands."

"Not that, exactly, but I—"

"Is his name Ralph Coningsby? Is he the Coningsby who Emma says is so attentive to—?"

He too straightened himself, throwing up his chin. Since so much had come out, he was ready to tell the whole story. "To Esther Legrand. Yes."

There was a pause and a stillness. "So you really got it—through *them*."

He took on an air of surprise. "I don't know what you mean by—through *them*. I got it through—"

"Through *her*, then. I supposed it was your own discovery—"

"So it was. They—or she—or whatever the pronoun you like to use—had nothing to do with it beyond the initial suggestion. I should never have taken the place if I hadn't thought it was the sort of thing you'd like. Since it isn't, I should greatly prefer—"

"To do something else. But I shouldn't." She leaned forward, and surprised him by seizing his hand. "Don't you see?—that's my point—that whatever you do, I want to accept it and make the best of it. I don't want to do it just grimly and stoically—but, since we must work out our lives together—"

He was afraid she was going to refer to the subjects touched on in the letter she had written him before the baby's birth, and so hastened to say: "Yes; I know what you mean. But if there's any making the best of things to be done it ought to be by me."

"I don't see that. If you've made a mistake—if *we've* made a mistake—we must stand by each other loyally—"

He drew her to him, almost lifting her from her chair. She crouched beside him on the window-seat, his arm about her. "I'll do the standing by, darling," he whispered, brokenly. "I don't want you to be worried by that. . . . If we've made a mistake, it's been mine more than yours. . . . In fact, it never was yours at all. . . . You saw how things were from the beginning. . . . You warned me. . . . You said it was wrong. . . . But what were we to do? . . . Who was there to take care of you? . . . And I do love you, Hilda, darling—in my way. . . . I want to take all the responsibility on myself. . . . So please don't speak about it again. . . . Don't write to me about it, either. . . ."

She drew herself slowly away, looking up at him with head thrown back, while his arm was still about her waist. "Charlie, what are you talking about? Is it about—the house?"

He was puzzled. "Why, no. I'm talking about—what you're talking about—what you wrote about."

She detached herself altogether, speaking with more astonishment. "What I wrote about? When?"

"Before baby was born—the last letter I had from you—"

"Oh—*that!*" She stood up, moving away from him toward the center of the room. "I don't remember very clearly what I said in it. I know I wrote it one evening when I was overwrought. I think I said that I shouldn't have married you—"

It was to justify himself that he explained: "You said something about—about a mistake—as you've said just now. But if you didn't mean it—"

Her voice was cold. "You're willing to let me take it back. Is that it?"

He tried to recapture his position. "No. I'm only asking you not to say it again."

"Because it can go without saying. I think that's what you mean, isn't it?"

"Not in the slightest."

She pressed a button turning on the central cluster of lights. "Then why do you speak of no blame being attached to me?—of what were we to do?—of taking the responsibility on yourself?"

"For the simple reason that I thought you were repeating what you had already written—"

"But I was talking of the house."

"Yes; so I see. But I thought you meant—the other thing."

She stood with hands folded and eyes downcast. "Then, suppose we make it—the other thing."

"I don't see the good of that, since you didn't mean it."

"But I see the good of it—since you *do* mean it."

He got up and went toward her. "Oh, come now, Hilda—"

She backed away from him to the wall, pressing another button and turning on the lights around the sides of the room. In the hard glare her eyes shot out the lambent flames he had already seen in them. She stood very erect and still. "Why not face the fact, Charlie? We've made a mistake. I said so in my letter, didn't I?—and you accepted it. No; don't say you didn't. You couldn't have blundered on as you've been doing now unless you'd been convinced of it in your heart."

"That's not fair, Hilda. I wasn't convinced of it in my heart. I only thought that as you'd laid such

stress on it—there might be something in it. That's all."

She laughed hardly. "That's all! As if it were not enough. But you're quite right. There *is* something in it. There's everything in it. We've made a mistake—and we're sorry for it."

"I'm not sorry for it."

She seemed to concentrate all her forces to utter the two words, "I am."

He started. "For God's sake, don't say that, Hilda, if it isn't true."

"It *is* true. You make it true. How can I not be sorry for a mistake you're ready to recognize so promptly?"

"But I'm not. I don't recognize it. I love you, Hilda."

She smiled, the bitter-sweet smile he had come to know. "Yes, Charlie; I think you do love me—with a divided heart. Of what you have to give, you do give me—something. I admit that. And when I do you justice I think you might try to do me justice in return. You might try to understand how hard it is for a woman like me—a proud woman—an exacting woman—yes, I know I'm exacting—to have to see at every turn that she's sharing her husband's heart with some one else."

"Oh, nonsense, Hilda—"

"It isn't nonsense. It isn't imagination or morbidness or any of the foolish fancies these things are so often declared to be. I *know*, Charlie. I know as well as if I was with you every hour of the day and entered into all your thoughts. Look me in the eyes and answer me. Tell me if it isn't so. Even in so intimate a matter as our new house, our home,

isn't it true that another woman is connected with it in your thoughts before I am—perhaps more women than one? Answer me. Look me in the eyes."

He looked her in the eyes, bracing his strength for a reply of some sort, when suddenly he found himself asking, inwardly: "What's the use?" No words of his could dispel her conviction. It would be lost labor to try.

He wheeled abruptly from her, stalking to the corner window, where, with his hands behind his back, he stood looking down on the street. It was not difficult to see that in her reference to the house her bow had been drawn more or less at a venture; and yet he had been hit so accurately that it revolted him to attempt a defense. As a matter of fact, he could think of no defense other than blank denial. He had been struck dumb. He felt stupefied, vacuous. It was into a totally empty mind that the words glided like a gibe, "Be sure your sin will find you out."

"Oh, pshaw!" he muttered impatiently, and turned. He must say something to Hilda, no matter what. The subject couldn't be dropped there.

"And if things between us are as you say—what would be your solution?"

There was no reply. The room was empty. She had slipped away in silence, leaving the lights flaring uselessly.

BOOK III

CHAPTER I

IN the spring of 1906 Charlie Grace began to perceive that the unhappiness of his married life was a matter of common knowledge among his friends. The first inkling of this fact came to him during the dinner given by Miss Hornblower in honor of the visit of Sir Osborne and Lady Tomlinson coming from Montreal. The festivity being to some extent a reunion of old parishioners of St. David's, Charlie Grace found himself seated between Mrs. Furnival and Mrs. Legrand. The conversation of the latter directed his mind toward a region of new thoughts.

"It's not that I'm criticizing my husband," she was saying. "I'm too good a wife to seek anything but his highest interests, don't you know I am? But no one can have been married into the Church as long as I've been without seeing that it's frightfully narrowing. If Rufus had been in another profession he'd have been as broad-minded as any one. As it is, he's cramped—and oh, so mistaken! I follow him as far as I can; but when a woman has such liberal views as I have they can't subscribe to everything, now can they? And as for this going on committees against divorce and trying to put it down, to my mind it's *all* wrong. What do you think?"

With a challenging little smile she held her head

to one side in an attitude compelling a still youthful archness to struggle with the encumbrance of a triple chin. His reply indicated sympathy with modern views on the subject of marriage, though he regretted the confusion of the laws.

"Oh, I don't care anything about the laws," the lady declared, daringly. "It's the *thing*. And where a man and woman are unhappy together I don't see any use in forcing them to keep it up. Do you?"

Though he knew the topic came near home, he did not at once suspect his friend of speaking with a motive. "To force them to keep it up is one thing; and for them to try to make the best of what they've let themselves in for is another."

"Oh, but when they *have* tried—and failed? When they've tried, and tried, and still don't suit each other? Don't you think it's pitiful then to see two human beings wasting their youth—and the years that might be happy—in an effort that will never come to anything?"

He acknowledged that it might be.

"And I've known so many cases just like that—so many cases where, I know, Mr. Legrand has advised them to keep together, but if they'd consulted me I should have told them to move apart. Here you are, I should have said, both young, both of good principles, both fitted for great happiness with some one else—but utterly and hopelessly unsuited to each other, I should have said. What law is there of God or man that can compel you to be wretched, when you might find some one else, and begin all over again? I should have said that. You see, I'm very broad. I've been through so

much that I understand the world as my husband can't. A clergyman knows so little of actual life, don't you know he doesn't? He's in his study—he's removed—he hasn't got to deal with vital things like you and I do. I make allowances for Rufus. He's all theory. He see so little of the practical side of life. I come in between that and him. I shelter him. Oh, I don't take any credit to myself. It's my duty. It's what I made up my mind to—partly—when I married into the Church. And yet I'm not sure if it isn't a mistake in some ways. What do *you* think? There's such a thing as sheltering a husband too much—especially when he's a clergyman. If Rufus only had some experience of divorce himself he'd broaden out."

Charlie Grace smiled. "He's not likely to get that, with such a wife as you, Mrs. Legrand."

"Oh, I wasn't thinking of it in that way. But if some one—well, some one near and dear to him were to—well, come in contact with it—then Rufus would see it as a practical thing."

"But there *is* no one near and dear to him but you—and Esther."

Mrs. Legrand hestitated, preened herself, and said boldly: "Well, if it *was* Esther—he'd think differently. If she were tied to some one with whom she was unhappy—or if she were to fall in love with a man who'd been—well, who'd been—let us say released—from some one with whom *he'd* been unhappy—that would bring the matter home to Rufus, don't you know it would?"

His eyes wandered down the table to where Miss Legrand, seated between Ralph Coningsby and Dr. Freddy Furnival, was talking with animation, now

to the one, now to the other, and now to both. "She doesn't look as if either fate were in store for her, just at present."

Mrs. Legrand sighed. "Poor darling! She has her troubles. And she's *so* brave."

"I suppose," he ventured, "that one of her troubles isn't—on her left?"

"Oh, dear, no. Ralph is no more to her than a nice boy. Not that he *is* a boy at his age—but he seems like it. She doesn't care for him in that way at all; and if she did, Mr. Legrand and I could never consent to it. He barely makes a living; and he has *no* expectations." The pause preceding her next words gave them significance. "And yet I often wish that it *was* he." A second pause heightened the effect. "It would be simpler."

He was about to ask the question "Simpler in what way?" when he caught her eye. He had never noticed before what a cold, hard eye it was. Now that he made the observation he could see that it had always been cold and hard, even when it had been the light of a silly, simpering face.

Before he could collect his wits to analyze her hints Mrs. Furnival turned to say: "So sorry Mrs. Grace isn't here. And how is she?"

He explained that the mild spring weather had tempted Hilda to take the children to their little place on Long Island Sound, where she would probably remain most of the time till the autumn. Yes; she would be in town occasionally; but the house in Seventy-fifth Street was too small to be comfortable, now that there were two children running about. Hilda preferred the country in any case. She had little taste for society, and less for

New York. If ever they built a house on Long Island she would probably make it her home. The present cottage was no more than a bungalow, which Miss Hornblower had constructed for herself during her parents' lifetime. Now that she owned the big house, she had been willing to sell him some twenty acres of her estate, including this picturesque little residence, all balconies and verandas. It was sufficient for their present needs, but, undoubtedly, when he could afford it he would build on a larger scale. Just now Hilda was occupied in laying out the bit of ground and making a garden. In this she was following Ralph Coningsby's plans.

While he talked to one neighbor he knew the other continued to listen, and presently Mrs. Legrand broke in again.

"So funny of Mrs. Grace not to care for society. With all her advantages she might become quite a leader in time, don't you know she might? I should have thought it was just the sort of thing *you* would have liked."

He murmured something about the expense of keeping up a social position in New York, adding that money didn't go as far in that city as he supposed it would before settling there.

She took this as a pleasantry. "Oh, money! A lot you need think of it. I only wish we had half your income, or a quarter of it. And young people like you and Mrs. Grace aren't expected to make a splurge all at once. I think it better taste not to. My cousin, Mrs. Kermit Van Iderstine, was all ready to take you both up, when you came here six years ago, and to push you. You'd have owed that to me," she concluded, archly.

He forced himself to smile. "I must thank you for the will, even if nothing came of the deed."

"Well, that isn't your fault or mine. And it isn't my cousin's fault, either. Mrs. Grace could have had anything she liked—which means that you'd have had it, too. I often think of what my Esther could do in that way—for the right man."

He glanced down the table again. The girl was in a flashing holiday mood, as she always was when in touch with any of the gayer phases of life. "He'll turn up—the right man," Charlie Grace said, at last.

Not to seem to mean too much Mrs. Legrand spoke lightly. "Unfortunately, in her case, the right man would be the one whom some people would think the wrong man. And she's *so* brave. But," she added, more seriously, "to return to Mrs. Grace. I shouldn't be the one to complain of her not liking society, should I?—when we profit by it to the extent of using your box at the opera. You don't know what that has meant to Esther. And she's been *so* much admired—now that she's been put where people can see her. It's *so* kind of you, don't you know it is?" She made one of her effective little pauses. "I only hope it won't be—misunderstood."

He felt obliged to say, "I don't see what there is to misunderstand."

"Oh, you wouldn't, Charlie. You're so kind you never see anything but the good. I only wish there were more like you. But *Esther* understands. I *think* she does. And she's *so* brave."

Feeling it wiser not to probe the meaning of this cryptic speech, notwithstanding the wild and foolish exultation it wrought in him, he turned once more

toward Mrs. Furnival, who was watching for a chance to say, in a whisper:

"I've been hearing the most extraordinary things about our host."

Charlie Grace's eyes traveled to the head of the table, where Reggie had been called on to play the man's part on behalf of his sister. He was no longer slim and elegant. At thirty-seven he was developing a waist-line to which no tailor could lend grace. His head had grown prematurely bald, his features bloated and his eyes dulled.

In response to Mrs. Furnival's confidence Charlie Grace murmured a polite, "Indeed?"

"And about our hostess," the lady continued. "It's as much about her as about him."

He grew visibly interested.

"Do you remember a girl named Bright? They used to be at St. David's in your father's time."

He admitted being able to recall her.

"Well, Reggie and she have been friends—very *great* friends—very great friends *indeed*."

As she waited for a response he said, "I think I've heard so."

"And now Fanny says they ought to be married. Did you ever hear anything like that?—from a sister, of all people!"

He smiled as he looked into the little old painted face gazing up into his, still with a trace of the pretty appeal it knew how to make some twenty or thirty years earlier. "But if you had a brother in the same situation, wouldn't *you* think so?"

She was shocked. "Oh, Charlie! I know you're very advanced and free-thinking, and all that, but you shouldn't make fun of me. I'm very conserva-

tive and orthodox. I've no sympathy with your loose modern ways of thinking. I'm greatly surprised at Fanny, I must say. And yet isn't it often that way?—that the sweet, gentle creature, who seems so good, will do the most scandalously daring things?"

"People sometimes seem daring when they're only brave."

"And you call it brave?—to urge a brother into such a match as that?"

"Wouldn't a match like that be better than—well, than the match they're making of it now?"

"You're really laughing at me. Oh, I know I'm old-fashioned. But it's principle, Charlie. You always come to grief when you get away from principles. And he looks so old, poor fellow, doesn't he? That must be—her. And I want to say something else, Charlie. It's about yourself. You won't be offended, will you? You know what a warm interest I've always taken in you."

He assured her of this, giving her authority to speak. After Mrs. Legrand's hints he was nervous as to what might be coming.

"I shouldn't say anything about it at all if Freddy hadn't spoken of it first. He's spoken of it several times—almost every time he's seen you of late. And you know what an interest I always take in you, don't you, Charlie? I'm very maternal that way about Freddy's friends. It's this. You're not looking well."

He laughed, not altogether mirthfully. "Oh, I'm well enough."

"And you look worried, Charlie. Since you've allowed me to go so far, I'll say that, too."

"That's likely enough. A man of thirty-eight, with a lot of irons in the fire—some of which persist in getting cold—has plenty of reason for looking worried."

She grew pensive. "I often think that it's not work that worries one so much as— You see, I've had such a lot of experience. My own life hasn't been always happy." From this tone she reacted quickly to say: "I wonder where Fanny gets these delicious water-ices. They're always better than any one else's." With this diversion she was able, without seeming too pointed, to begin again on a note of sympathy. "I wish Mrs. Grace *was* more in town—or went about more when she is here. I feel so for young married people. If there'd only been some one to guide me in the first years of my own life! But I wish you'd see Freddy. He's said two or three times that he didn't like your looks. How funny it is that I should be the mother of a great, wise man like that. They say he's perfectly wonderful for some things—his specialty, you know. His father was a good—*doctor*. Every one admitted that. But I wish you'd see him, Charlie. It couldn't do you any harm. And when Mrs. Grace is in town if there's anything I can do—a young married woman often likes to have a confidante—some one who's been through it herself, you know—"

It was a relief to Charlie Grace when Fanny rose and the ladies followed her. Even then themes of health were not wholly at an end, for later in the evening, in the drawing-room, Esther approached him to say:

"Did you know our dear old Remnant wasn't well?

He's been confined to the house for a fortnight—the very first time in his life."

He could have given his mind more intelligently to this information if he hadn't seen in her crossing the floor to speak to him a significance that set his heart to pounding and brought color to his sallow cheek. He had been carefully avoiding *her*. He had been doing it with the echo of her mother's words in his ears: "I hope it won't be misunderstood." He began to be afraid that there was no longer a chance of that—that the understanding of his situation—and Esther's—was all too clear. Since the scraps of conversation at the table he was conscious of a growing sense of alarm. It had not occurred to him before that their little group of intimates could be interesting themselves in the relations existing between himself and Hilda. He and she had been so discreet as to their agreement to differ that it was difficult to see how the fact of it could have leaked out. He had been discreet, too, with regard to Esther—or at least he thought he had. For the past two or three years he had been the privileged friend of the Legrand family, but purely on the score of ties dating from boyhood. It was a thoroughly honorable friendship, with nothing behind it that the world knew anything about. Even Hilda had come to acknowledge, or to seem to acknowledge, that there was nothing in it to fear. She had resigned herself to it with apparent indifference, and was willing that Mrs. Legrand should use the box at the opera, since she, Hilda, had a distaste for doing so herself. She had grown indifferent, too, to his other kindnesses to the Legrand family—flowers, tickets, entertainments,

and what not—attentions by which an old friend is permitted to brighten the lives of those less well off than himself.

It was a pleasant arrangement, giving satisfaction to him without injuring Esther. She was sheltered by her innocence. He could never see that her liking for him was different from her affection for Remnant—on another plane. He certainly didn't interfere with the chances of Ralph Coningsby, or with those of two or three other impecunious young men who hung about the rectory. Even they didn't regard him as interfering—looking upon him as an elderly fellow, with a taste for fatherly benevolence. As for himself, if he adored the girl, it was no one's business but his own. If he considered that the adoration was worth the price he paid for it in silent, carefully hidden suffering, that, too, was his affair.

It was the more disturbing, then, to find that what he supposed to be locked up in his heart was being whispered in the streets, and perhaps published on the housetops. It was a shock to learn that possibly Esther cared for him. It was a shock with an element of wild, lawless joy in it, a joy that made the restraints and conventions of organized society trivial, giving a kind of glory to the act of transcending them. In the impulse of this joy one could abandon wife and child and sacrifice everything that the world commends. One could be lost in it, and by it, and for it, and find ruin worth while. Earthly considerations were to it but as the shackles of green withes to Samson. Duty and honor and moral codes were as meaningless to its needs as sunsets to dwellers in the sun. One could be pilloried and

outlawed for it, only to discover the glorious liberty of the spirit and the heart.

He had had these thoughts before; he had had them in dreams and longings and minutes of bitterness; but not till now had they followed him into waking, working life. They surged up clamorously within him as he saw her cross the room toward him. Deliberately, easily, with a certain unconscious courage, perhaps with unconscious recklessness, she left the group about her and came to him. Eyes followed her; whispers followed her. She was splendidly unaware of both. She could afford to be unaware of both, if for nothing but the grace of her free, unaffected movements. Only such grace could have carried with distinction the rich dress of amber-colored silk with long, sweeping train — too old for her even at twenty-five—which had shed its first luster, a year or two before, on Mrs. Peter Legrand. In his mood at the minute it was as if she had heard the call of his heart and were responding to it.

"How old is Remnant?"

It was all he could think of to say.

"Not so very old—not quite seventy. But as he's never been ill before we're anxious about him. I dare say it's no more than a bad cold."

"You go to see him?"

She laughed. "Of course I do—every day. He'd think it very strange if I didn't."

"I've often wondered how the old chap lived. Not having a wife, or a family, or any home that I ever heard of—"

"He *was* rather forlorn till we came here. He knocked about, first in one lodging-house, then in

another. It was all very well when he was younger; but it was hard on him as he got up in years. Now we've put him—that is, father and I have—with a nice, motherly Englishwoman who takes very good care of him. I'll let you know how he gets along. I may even persuade you to go and see him, if he doesn't soon get about. He's devoted to Mr. Charlie, as he calls you."

She nodded and left him. There was nothing in the brief conversation to stir the pulses, and yet he felt himself glowing as from a magic draught. Since he had been afraid to go to her, she had come to him. She had done it calmly and boldly, as if bringing him her love before all the world. "Esther understands," her mother had said. He was sure that it was because she understood that she had insisted on giving him these few words, smiling into his eyes.

He was still under their spell when Miss Hornblower took the opportunity, just as he was about to follow the example of Osborne and Emma in bidding her good night, to say:

"Are you in a great hurry? Couldn't you wait a few minutes after the others have gone? There's something I want to speak to you about particularly, and I don't know when I shall have another chance. I leave for my little place in Prince Edward Island very soon."

Feeling that he had no choice but to remain, he stood in a comfortable attitude before the fire, watching Fanny speed her parting guests. He didn't forget the fact that he used to suspect her of being in love with him, and, though until recently he had not seen her intimately for many years, he suspected it still. He was far from believing that this fruitless

affection had been the reason why she had never married, and yet he couldn't help taking it as a concomitant cause. It was possible to think her, as most people thought her, the American spinster by natural vocation, and still to credit her with some bit of tender, unacknowledged romance, laid away now with pansies for thought, and rosemary for remembrance, and lavender for sweet, perpetual perfume, but once a living and a breathing thing. She was that sort of person. With her pale face, pale hair, and pale eyes, she was the negation of all the emotions but those of a gentle goodness. It was a goodness not inconsistent with authority—the authority that comes by instinct to the mistress of a large income. It was a gentleness not blind to the necessity for dressing well—her white draperies doing much to conceal her angularity. She wore pearls round her neck, and pearls and diamonds and emeralds on her long, thin, white hands. Of all the women of his acquaintance Charlie Grace considered her as in essentials most distinctively the gentlewoman—with the gentlewoman's tact and courtesy and reserve and hauteur and characteristic minutes of shyness.

He felt it a privilege, therefore, to be seated with her in intimate conversation before the dying fire, so placed that they could look into each other's eyes if they chose, or, if they chose, gaze at the smoldering embers. Fanning herself slowly with a small white fan bestrewn with golden spangles, she plunged into her subject at once.

"I hardly know how to say what I want to say, Charlie—and perhaps I don't even know what I ought to say. It's about Esther."

He leaned forward, an arm across one knee, a hand supported on the other. His response was in the way in which he looked up at her.

"Some of us are a little—worried about her," she explained, further.

"About her—and me?"

"Not about you so much as about her—for the reason that you can take care of yourself."

"Take care of myself—how?"

"I mean that if what we're afraid of were to happen you could gather up the pieces of your life and still make something out of it—at the worst; whereas hers would be shattered beyond any recovery of the fragments—at the best."

"And what is it you're afraid may happen?"

She stopped fanning herself to look at him steadily. "Don't you know?"

He weighed the question for some seconds. "Suppose I admit that I do know, will you tell me whom you mean by *we?*"

"I mean myself, first of all. And then I mean Mrs. Legrand—"

"Is *she* afraid?"

"She's anxious."

"Anxious—for what result?"

She smiled dimly. "I'd rather not talk about that—just yet, at any rate."

"And when you say *we*, do you include—Hilda?"

It was her turn to weigh the question. "I *didn't* include her—but I suppose I could."

"You and Hilda have become very confidential, haven't you?"

"Naturally, when I'm at Idlewild and she's at the bungalow we see a good deal of each other. The

very fact that nowadays you always stay in New York throws us the more together. I suppose she feels it necessary to give me some sort of explanation of things between you being as they are."

"And how are they?—from Hilda's point of view. *I* don't know."

She turned her fan over and examined the other side. "Don't you think you ought to ask *her*?"

"No; because I shouldn't get an answer—that is, an answer that would tell me anything. You know Hilda's capacity for silence. When I'm near her it's more than silence—it's absence as well. She has a way of retiring into a world of her own into which apparently I've never been worthy to enter."

"Did you ever try?"

"I've never tried for the same reason that I've never tried to reach the moon. I don't see any way of getting there. But that's not quite the point. Does Hilda think that we're likely to be—" It required some bracing of himself before he could pronounce the word. "Does Hilda think," he began again, "that we're likely to be—separated?"

"Do you?"

He raised himself, leaning back in his arm-chair. "I don't believe you get my drift, Fanny. What I think so largely depends on what Hilda thinks that I have to discover her wishes before I can form opinions of my own."

"Then I can tell you as much as this—she doesn't want to be separated."

"Is that for her sake, or my sake, or the children's?"

"It's for everything—for the sake of her whole ideal of marriage."

"And what about her ideal of happiness?"

She hesitated. "I'm not sure that I ought to speak about that. It belongs so exclusively between you two."

"But if Hilda has spoken of it—"

"She never has—at any rate, not all at once. I've only inferred—"

"That's just what I want to know. What have you inferred?"

She looked pensively into the embers. "That she hasn't had any ideal of happiness—not since she discovered that you—that you cared for some one else—and considered your marriage to her a mistake."

"But she considers it a mistake, too. She said so. She wrote it to me. She led me into agreeing with her."

She turned to him with a pitying smile. "Oh, Charlie, you can't always go by what a woman says on a subject like that. Every woman has times when she wonders if she didn't do her husband an injury in marrying him. I know she wrote it to you—before Billy was born. If it hadn't been just then, she might never have said it."

He raised his eyebrows. "How was I to know that?"

"It doesn't matter whether you could know it or not. The point lies not in her saying it, but in your believing it. If you hadn't believed it, she might have said it a hundred times, and it wouldn't have done any harm."

"I believed it because—"

"Because you believed it. There's no other explanation than that. When she saw that you believed it, her ideal of happiness—since you ask

about that—was shattered. Nothing but years of tenderness could have put it together again—and you haven't given her years of tenderness."

"I've been as tender as she'd let me be."

"As tender as she'd let you be after she'd conceded you the right to be equally tender to Esther."

"I don't think I've asked her to concede much there. I've asked her—tacitly, that is—not to be suspicious. That's all."

"She didn't have to be suspicious. She *knew*. We all knew. Everybody knew."

He swung round from his contemplation of the smoldering logs to face her. "What did you know?"

"Oh, Charlie, don't ask me. It's too distressing to think about, much less to discuss. I shouldn't speak of it at all if I were not alarmed for Esther. I should think you'd be alarmed about her, too."

He got up restlessly, standing with his back to the fire. "Why should you be alarmed? What do you think she'd do?"

"Oh, I don't know. She's a strange girl—a beautiful, noble girl—but if she got an idea into her head—or into her heart—which might be worse—"

"And may I ask if you have the same first-hand knowledge of her that you have of Hilda?"

"N-no. Of course, I've studied her—since we've all been so distressed about—the situation. But I don't know her so very well."

"You mean that you're not actually in her confidence."

"Not in hers."

"In her mother's, then."

"That's more—it."

He was silent a minute, tilting on his toes, and

flapping the tails of his coat before the fire. "Look here, Fanny," he began at last; "what do you think of the mother?"

She looked up at him, then down. "Oh, I think —a good many things."

"You think she's straight?"

"I think she's very straight—with regard to herself. She doesn't conceal anything."

"She doesn't conceal—that she's very ambitious."

She smiled, and shook her head. "I'm afraid not."

"Desperately ambitious."

"I'm afraid 'desperately' is the word."

"And terrified—"

"Yes; terrified, too. Esther seems to attract the poor young men rather than the rich ones—"

"And with the mother money counts before everything. Isn't that it?"

"Oh, you mustn't be too hard on her. You see, the poor thing has been starved all these years—starved, that is, for the sort of thing she cares about. I don't say it's a very fine sort of thing; but it means as much to her as if it was. And Mr. Legrand has never perceived it. He wouldn't, you know. He's the kind of saintly man who'd give the half of his goods to feed the poor, and take for granted that his own family can get along without money. It's rather pitiful—and sublime, too—the way he lives his life thinking his wife reflects his ideals—when all the while she's fighting with might and main against them."

"But Esther reflects them."

"Y-yes."

"You say that doubtfully."

"No, it isn't doubtfully. She's young and eager and full of the zest of life. She reflects anything that comes her way. Since what has come her way has been good and noble, it's been all right. But she's her mother's child as well as her father's. You must see that."

"I don't know that I do."

"Oh, you must. You must see it in her love of pleasure, in the delight she takes in everything brilliant and gay—"

"Surely that's natural enough at her age."

"Oh, quite. I'm only saying that she enjoys it. She enjoys it so much that if a great temptation were put in her way—"

"Well? What then?"

"It would be—a temptation."

"Will you tell me exactly what you mean by that?"

"No, Charlie; I won't. I'm not sure that I know—not any more than one knows what sort of storm is coming when one sees the clouds gathering. It's sufficient to see that there's likely to be a storm."

"And take shelter? Is that what you mean?"

"No; give shelter."

"Give shelter—to Esther?"

"To Esther, in the first place." She waited a minute, then added quietly: "I mean to ask her to come with me to Prince Edward Island. If that doesn't attract her, I shall invite her to spend the summer with me abroad."

"Is that to get her away from me?"

"It's to get you away from each other. I said it would be giving shelter to Esther in the first place; but in the second it would be to you."

"I don't see where that would come in."

She reflected. "I've thought that if Esther were not actually here, you might give more thought to yourself."

"To myself?"

She gazed straight up into his face. "You look ill, Charlie. Hasn't anybody told you that?"

He ignored the question. "And you think I should get better if she were away?"

"I don't say that, Charlie. But it would give you time and quiet to think in. That means a good deal, you know. It's something I myself learned—by experience. If I hadn't done so perhaps I shouldn't venture to recommend it now. I'll tell you something. I once had a great trouble—like yours—only different. And they took me away. I didn't want to go at first—but after I had gone—I came to see—that separation—and solitude—"

"Helped you to forget," he said, bitterly.

"No; not to forget; to remember—but to remember with more—inward peace. That's what I found, Charlie; and that's what I'm offering to help you find. If you don't want it for yourself you'll not refuse it to Esther, will you?"

He was a long time silent, tilting on his toes and staring moodily at the hearth-rug. When at last he spoke it was to say:

"It's awfully good of you, Fanny. But it seems to me that there's a more practical way than that—if Hilda would only take it."

CHAPTER II

"NOW, Charlie, what *is* the matter?"

Emma spoke in the authoritative tone of one who has a right to inquire into the situation and deal with it. Her brother busied himself with arranging small articles on his desk—the carved Renaissance desk that had been the nucleus of the furnishing of the library and of the whole house. Emma had looked in after the Sunday morning service at St. Thomas's, while Osborne had gone back to the hotel. It was a minute or more before Charlie Grace made up his mind what to say.

"Everything's the matter."

"Why should I meet that man Ellis prowling round the house?"

He tore up an old envelope, throwing the fragments into the waste-paper basket. "To-day? He isn't usually about on Sundays."

"Does that mean that he is on other days?"

"Sometimes—often, in fact. Perhaps he lives in the neighborhood, though I don't believe he does." A slight change in his tone indicated a resolve to be frank. "The truth is—he dogs me."

"Dogs you? What for?"

"The Lord knows; I don't. I suppose he must get some fun out of it. I meet him everywhere—at every turn. He must like looking at me. Or, perhaps—he likes me to look at him."

"He's not a pretty sight. He must drink—or take drugs. He's a wreck."

He tore up some old letters. "Possibly that's why he likes to have me look at him."

"Does he ever speak to you?"

"Never."

"Nor you to him?"

"I nod to him if he's right under my feet."

"I must say I think that's very good of you, after the way he betrayed you about the Buffalo & New London."

"Oh, he didn't betray me. I bear him no grudge for that—exactly. He knew it would dish the whole business, and me in particular, if he gave it away to the newspapers—and he gave it away. I don't blame him. It's what I should probably have done to him if I'd been in his place. I dare say he got a little money for it, too. I hope he did."

Emma looked at him curiously. Because she was stouter she made it a point to sit even more erect, choosing on this occasion the foot of the sofa, where she should find no support. Her face had grown softer, mellower, just as that of the old rector of St. David's had done in his later life. Her white hair, rolled high from the forehead, gave added dignity to her countenance.

"I must say, Charlie, you speak very dispassionately about it, considering the harm he's done you."

"If I speak dispassionately it's because I feel so. The failure of the Buffalo & New London deal is only a drop in the bucket."

"It's a very big drop in the bucket—according to Sir William Short. Perhaps you didn't know that."

He shrugged his shoulders. "Oh yes, I did.

I know Short's opinion of me. He'll supersede me here one of these days. He thinks that as far as New York is concerned I haven't made good. Well, if that was the only way in which I haven't made good I should be able to laugh."

She studied him again. "Charlie, what *is* the matter? Surely you're not taking drugs, like Ellis. You look it. It's no use saying you don't, because you do."

"No, I'm not taking drugs." He pulled out a drawer and looked into it. "My dope is harder to knock off than drugs."

She seemed to debate within herself as to how closely she might question him. "Is your dope—in Vandiver Place?"

He stooped, peering into the back of the drawer. "What makes you ask?"

"I ask because if it is—you ought to be ashamed of yourself."

"Well, I *am* ashamed of myself. But that doesn't make any difference—to the dope."

"And the dope is that you're in love with a girl young enough to be your daughter."

"Oh, hardly that. I'm thirty-eight, and she's twenty-five. That's not so much, as between a man and a woman."

His quiet admission of the charge nonplussed her. The question sounded futile even to herself as she asked, "Then, what are you going to do about it?"

"What *can* I do about it?"

"It isn't what you *can* do so much as what you *must*."

"And what I must do is do nothing, as far as I can see now."

"What about—her?"

He glanced up from his inspection of the drawer. "Her? Who?"

"I meant—the girl. Does she—does she—m'm—feel as you do?"

"I haven't asked her."

"But you know."

"If I know, it's because others have made it their business to find out—and tell me."

Emma sought relief to her feelings by getting up and flouncing about the library. She was less dignified when she walked. "I call it ridiculous."

"Oh, it's ridiculous, all right. You might say even harsher things than that."

"And Hilda? How in the world could she let you do it?"

"Oh, Hilda isn't to blame."

"Don't tell me that. Shouldn't I be to blame if Noddy went meandering after young women half his age? I've no patience with Hilda. It's no use saying I have, because I haven't. What's Hilda done in New York?—with all her advantages! Nothing."

He leaned back in his chair, looking up at her. Emma being a Grace like himself, there was no need for him to beat about the bush. "You mustn't estimate Hilda's advantages too highly. That's a mistake we've all made. We've made it from the first. Father made it before us, and we've been making it since." He took on a slightly defiant air, as one about to utter heresy. "The Penrhyns aren't much—not as New York is constituted to-day."

"They're a very good family—as a starting-point.

I don't say it's everything; but with money to back it up—"

"And that's another thing. It takes a lot of money to cut a figure in New York. I've found that out. It takes more than I've got—or than I'm likely to have—now. Before we came here for good I thought we were going to do the deuce and all. I thought I could buy up the place. I thought Hilda would only have to appear to put all the other women in the shade. Well—" He grew reminiscent. "Well, she hardly ever appeared—and when she did—she was like a pansy in a garden of tulips. She was very pretty—very pretty indeed—but she didn't *show*, if you know what I mean—she didn't dazzle, as I expected—"

"My dear Charlie, no one with any sense could ever have expected Hilda to dazzle—or to show, either. That isn't her style. But she could have *worked*. She could have played the cards that were right in her hand. That's where I blame her. It's no use saying I don't, because I do. I know women who've come to New York without half her wires to pull, and no more money than you—and now they're at the top of the tree. Oh, don't tell *me*. If Hilda had liked—"

He was getting used to this formula now; nevertheless, he felt it his duty to defend his wife.

"Well, she didn't like. That's all there is to say about it. Or, rather," he added, with a determination to be just, "she might have come to like if I hadn't taken the heart out of her from the start."

Tact forbidding her to question him as to this statement, she contented herself with saying: "Of

course, I've seen for several years past that she wasn't happy."

"Neither of us is happy," he declared with emphasis; "and what's more, we never shall be happy. God knows it isn't for want of trying, either. We've done our best to patch it up ever so often—and always with the same result. As a matter of fact, Hilda is more to be pitied than I am."

"Why?"

"Because she's tied to a man she despises; while I'm only tied to a woman whom I respect and admire."

"H'm! Are you quite sure of that—as to Hilda's change toward you?"

"It isn't a change. It's the way she felt toward me from the first. She never made any bones about saying so. I was fatuous enough to think I might win her esteem—but it was out of the question. I've only succeeded in losing my own."

"Of course you lose it—when you go falling in love with some one else."

He turned a haggard face on her. "How was I to help that? Do you suppose I did it of my own accord? Do you think I wouldn't far rather have been true to Hilda and become a respectable husband and father? I don't say that I'm a saint, or that I shouldn't have kicked over the traces now and then, whatever happened; but I should have remained true in soul. But this thing came—through forces beyond my control—"

There was tenderness in her voice as she said: "And now you're miserable."

"I'm more than miserable. I'm *sick*."

"Sick of marriage?"

"No; sick of myself. I wish to God I could die. I often think that if it weren't for the children I could take a gun and—"

"Now, now, Charlie; don't make yourself any more foolish than you are."

"Well, why shouldn't I? What's the good of a life like mine? Every day I live I make it harder for some one. If I were to—to get out now, I could cut the whole knot. I could do it with a rag of credit, too—credit that's being used up so fast that it mayn't hold out much longer. I could leave money enough for my wife and children to live on; and I could save them—and some one else—from all sorts of painful developments—"

"Charlie, don't talk nonsense. If you were *going* to die you'd feel differently."

She came and sat down by the desk. For the first time in his life he saw her lip tremble and a dash of tears moisten her steady eyes. It was a new complication to realize that Emma loved him—loved him, that is, with something more than the clannish, shoulder-to-shoulder loyalty of Grace toward Grace. Indeed, it was something of a surprise to him that Emma's cold heart could love any one.

"Oh, I know I'm a coward as well as a cad—" he began.

"What would you like? What do you want? If you could have the whole situation arranged to suit you, what would you say?"

He rested his forehead on his hand. "I don't know."

"Would a separation between you and Hilda be any good?"

"I don't see that it would. We're separated now

—to all intents and purposes. I shall go down to Rosyth now and then, but only to keep up appearances. As a matter of fact, I'm going down for next Sunday; but Hilda likes it better when I don't come. Apparently, she's afraid of my influence on the children."

"You're fond of them?"

"I *was*."

"But you surely can't mean that you aren't still?"

He groaned impatiently. "Oh, I don't know. Since this—this other thing—this infatuation, if you like—has come over me, Hilda and the kids don't seem to belong to me any more. They're miles away from me. When Billy and Milly climb on my knee and throw their arms around my neck, they might be any chance young ones from an orphanage. I've known two or three hounds in my time who've deserted their wives and children—and I've wondered how they could do it. And now, by God, I could do it myself—if it weren't for the decencies."

"But you wouldn't?"

His eyes rolled slantwise toward her. "If she'd come . . . I couldn't help myself. . . . That's the way it generally happens."

"But she wouldn't go."

He gave her another oblique look. "I don't know, I'm sure. She's a strange girl. I don't believe any one knows *what* she'd do—under stress."

She was silent for some minutes. "Charlie, you appal me," she said, at last.

He laughed grimly. "Oh, that's nothing. I don't appal you half as much as I appal myself."

On the following Saturday afternoon Charlie Grace walked up the sandy road leading from the wayside station of Rosyth to his little property on the Sound. He walked slowly, partly from a lack of physical energy, partly from reluctance to arrive. It was to postpone the minute of getting there that he had chosen to send his bag by the motor that had come to the station to meet him, while he plodded homeward on foot. He used the word homeward with some emphasis, to remind himself that the twenty acres of which he could see the undulations at the end of the vista the road made through the wood were actually his own. There had been a time when the fact would have made him proud, would have inspired a happy sense of lordship. But the place had grown alien to him. Toward the wife and children it sheltered the numbness of his emotions had become poignant. He took, therefore, no pleasure in the silvery greening of the wood, or in the luscious cadences of nesting birds, or in the flash of waters caught through the tresses of birch trees in new leaf and across plowed fields. He took no pleasure in apple trees in blossom, or lilacs purpled along the top, or syringa starry and heavy-scented. He took no pleasure in the wind with the tang of salt in it. On reaching the confines of his own land he took no pleasure in seeing the earth raked smooth for the kitchen-garden, and green things under the glass of forcing beds, and the gardener's boy tending with the watering-can long lines of recently set-out seedlings. In a wild corner yellow violets, long ago transplanted by Fanny Hornblower from the deeper wood, strewed the grass with gold-dust, while trilliums, wan and virginal, shot up from patches of

fresh fern; but he took no pleasure in them. When he passed his own gate he took no pleasure in the bit of shaven lawn, or in pansies staring with wide-eyed innocent faces, or in jonquils fading to the pallor of stars at dawn, or in tulips closing their cups as the sun passed westward, or in irises just beginning to show their fleurs-de-lis along the lines of a ravine which was once a little brook. Yesterday at this hour he had been in Vandiver Place, trumping up an errand to Rufus Legrand in the hope of seeing Esther. He had seen her—for a minute or two only—busy, radiant—but neither so radiant nor so busy as not to have time to fling him a word and a look that told him, what so many little things had told him since her mother had given him the key to them, that she "understood." There was a beauty and a perfume to the movement and grime of the old street in which she dwelt such as belonged to no springtide earth or tree or flower or flashing sea.

As he came now within sight of the house his feet dragged more heavily. It was a long, low, red-roofed house, a cottage rather than a bungalow, with gables, dormer windows, and deep verandas. Wisteria climbed its wooden columns, dropping its first mauve clusters along the eaves. Beyond the house the bank broke steeply to the shore, to which there was access by a long, irregular wooden stairway.

From the direction of this stairway Charlie Grace's presence was announced by a childish shout. "Here's papa!" A tall, slim lad of five, with a wooden spade in one hand and a pail in the other, came bounding across the grass, followed breathlessly and laboriously by a little dumpling girl, who screamed in imitation of her brother:

"Here'd papa!" Charlie Grace stopped in the roadway, nominally to let the children reach him, but really to conjure up, if possible, a heartiness to match theirs.

He couldn't. Everything that made heartiness was paralyzed within him. He was quite sure that the smile he tried to assume was nothing but a ghastly rictus, for as the boy drew near he, too, stopped, lifting on his father eyes that seemed prematurely perplexed and careworn. It was the thing that Charlie Grace had always remarked about this boy—that his eyes had the pained and questioning look a dog's will get in a house of sorrow. They were like the eyes of one grieving—grieving by intuition—grieving for things he didn't know about, and yet sought to understand.

"Hello, papa!"

The greeting was delivered from a distance and with a certain guardedness.

"Hello, boy! Come here."

The boy went forward, his puzzled eyes still lifted to his father's. He relaxed none of his cautiousness. "Uncle Noddy's here, papa, and Aunt Emma."

The little girl, who had now toddled up, repeated this information. "Uncle Noddy's here, papa, and Auntie Emma."

The father seized her, tossed her upward, kissed her, and set her down. She was brown like Hilda, with Hilda's mournful chestnut eyes. The boy harked back to the Downses and Gunnisons. He had the wistful face, tipped with the long pointed chin, that Milly Downs had carried to her grave at Horsehair Hill thirty years before he was born.

Satisfied with her greeting, Milly padded along

toward the house, while Billy marched sedately by his father's side.

"Are you going to live here now, papa?"

The question being a leading one, Charlie Grace hedged in his reply. "Why do you ask?"

"Because Uncle Noddy says there's no law to make you if you don't want to. What's law, papa?"

They took a few steps in silence. "Should you *like* me to live here?"

"Y-yes."

"Why?"

"Because you take us out in the boat—and you can whistle—and you can talk like us. Antonio can't talk like us—only just a very little. When he wants to say Yes he says Si. What makes him do that, papa? Antonio is watering the spinach. Did you see him when you came along? I helped to water them yesterday. You must always water them in the afternoon, before the sun goes down. Did you know that, papa?"

Charlie Grace approached his objective point by degrees. "And would Milly like me to live here?"

"Oh, Milly's too little. She don't care."

"Well, would mama like me to live here?"

There was long hesitation. "Mama cries," the boy said, at last.

"Cries about me?"

"She *says* it isn't about you."

"Did you ask her?"

He nodded. "M'h, m'h!"

"But you think it *is* about me."

He nodded, with stronger affirmation. "M'h, m'h!"

"Why?"

"Oh, because."

Feeling it unwise to probe this reason too deeply, Charlie Grace went on in silence to the house.

"Mama is out here, with Uncle Noddy and Aunt Emma," the boy explained, leading his father to the veranda overlooking the Sound.

Emma and Hilda were seated in wicker chairs—the former knitting, the latter with empty hands. Sir Osborne leaned carelessly against a pillar of the veranda, smoking a cigar. No one could look at him now without seeing at a glance that he wasn't an American. Wearing Harris tweeds of heather-brown, knickerbockers, golf-stockings, thick English country boots, and a Tam o' Shanter of the same material as his coat, he might have passed for a Scottish laird—an effect borne out by his stubby grizzled beard and the cheerful red of his complexion. The fact that he was slighter than in youth, heightened his resemblance to a veteran sportsman of the moors. His voice, which had long been growing more English, had finally—perhaps imperceptibly—transformed an American staccato into a British syncopation.

"I say, here's old Charlie now," was his exclamation, as his brother-in-law came round the corner of the house.

Lady Tomlinson tried to restrain undue self-consciousness. "Why, speak of the—! Well, I won't say what."

Hilda, who sat with chin resting on the hand supported by the arm of her wicker chair, lifted her soft eyes to her husband, but without changing her position. "How do you do, Charlie?" she thought it enough to say.

Charlie Grace kissed his wife and his sister, and shook hands with Osborne. As he turned from the latter to look for a chair Hilda continued quietly, still without changing her position: "Osborne and Emma have been asking me if I should like a divorce."

He backed away to the rail of the veranda, leaning against it like Osborne. While he was shocked, he was also conscious of a wild joy that the subject was at last laid bare. It would no longer be necessary to dodge it; he could even own to the love existing between himself and Esther Legrand, since every one else seemed to be aware of it. It was a wonderful thought that he might be free again—free to break away from this strange woman, these strange children, this strange house—free to go to her with whom his soul was at home, whose soul was at home with him. If Hilda consented he could do it at the negligible cost of dollars and cents and his self-respect. The dollars and cents were of no importance—and as for his self-respect, he had squandered it so freely that what was left of it wasn't worth retaining. He had come to feel of it as the spendthrift feels about the remnant of his fortune, that it might as well follow the rest. There was even a curious recklessness in seeing it go. There was more still in thinking of what Esther might give up for him. Holy and pure, she might sacrifice her holiness and her purity. It was appalling, and yet it was sublime. Lifted high above him, she might choose to come down and be no better than he. He got the same sort of thrill from it that, in the patriarchal days, a daughter of men might have felt when one of the sons of God renounced for her sake the glories of heaven.

These thoughts rose in him confusedly as he backed against the rail, and in answer to Hilda's words said, falteringly:

"Well, would you?"

Her response came decisively. "No."

With the monosyllable an iron door seemed to close again on the freedom of his heart, but he was able to say, in a matter-of-fact tone: "Then, that leaves no more to be said."

"It's only fair to explain, Charlie," Emma interposed, "that Noddy and I didn't ask Hilda just what she seems to imply."

"No, by Jove," Sir Osborne corroborated. "Never interfere between husband and wife. Always get the worst of it."

"We were only trying to put before Hilda," Emma continued, her eyes on her knitting-needles, which plied rapidly, "the different courses open to her. That's just one. We're not recommending it. Far from it. But whatever you and Charlie do, Hilda, we feel that, as those who stand nearest to you, we have a right to say that we don't consider the present situation wholly satisfactory—neither Noddy nor I don't—"

"I do." Hilda raised her head slowly and looked at each of them in turn. "It's quite satisfactory to me. Why shouldn't it be? Charlie is very kind. He lets me live here. He gives me money. He doesn't interfere with my way of bringing up the children—or care what we do. I don't see how I could be better off, even if I were divorced. I certainly shouldn't be any the more free. Nobody could be freer than I am—within reason."

The men seemed to wait for Emma to speak. She

did so after some seconds of watching her needles and counting her stitches. "Mind you, Hilda, you mustn't think we're urging you to this thing. It's no use saying we are, because we aren't. We should consider it a great calamity. It wouldn't be as great a calamity, of course, as it used to be, but one likes to avoid it if one can. All we're trying to do is to help you and Charlie to work out some better plan than the one you're acting on at present."

"There couldn't be a better plan for me."

"Oh, but I say, Hilda—what about him?"

She smiled. "What about him, Osborne? Why, he has the life that suits him. I don't interfere with it. I haven't for years, have I, Charlie?"

It was Emma who replied. "That may be true, Hilda. But if you think it's happiness—"

"I don't—only I've long ago given up any idea of that."

"But perhaps Charlie hasn't."

"That's something, Emma, I don't know anything about. Charlie doesn't tell me what he has given up and what he has not; so that I've no means of knowing."

"But if he were to tell you now?"

Hilda looked steadily at her sister-in-law. To her husband the flame in her eyes indicated that she was growing dangerous. "I don't believe he'd find it worth while to try. Charlie and I have discussed a good many things during the past six or seven years —but it's always been as hard to understand each other as if we hadn't a common speech. As a matter of fact, we haven't a common speech, have we, Charlie? We've not only different idioms, but we've dif-

ferent ideas behind them. We may not have learned much during our married life, but we've at least discovered that much."

She rose, as if to put an end to the topic. Emma still considered the rapid tric-trac of her knitting-needles. "You mustn't think," she began, in a conciliatory tone, "that I'm Charlie's champion any more than yours—"

Hilda's little figure, thrown into relief against the background of sea, straightened itself. She rested a hand on the back of the chair from which she had just risen. "Oh, but I do, Emma. You *are* Charlie's champion. You always have been. It's very natural that you should be. I bear you no ill-will for it whatever. Only, don't think that I haven't understood you all these years. I've seen exactly what my value was to you and Charlie. It's wonderful how the same vein of calculation has run through you both. I suppose it must go with being a Grace. I've even been afraid of detecting it in my own children."

Emma's knitting fell to her lap. It was one of the few occasions in her life on which her face betrayed consternation. "Hilda, I haven't the faintest idea of what you're talking about."

"Oh yes, you have, Emma. You know very well what I mean. And so does Charlie. And so does Osborne. You thought I was worth while because I was a Penrhyn. You were good enough to attribute a quality to that name which didn't go with Tomlinson or Grace. It's possible you were right. I don't know. It's something I should never have spent my time considering. I don't say that you weren't always kind to mama and me—but I do say you

were kind to us with a motive—the motive of one day finding us useful."

Dumbfounded and fascinated, Emma stared up at her sister-in-law. Osborne, too, gazed at her helplessly, his jaw dropped, the hand holding the cigar hanging limply at his side. Charlie Grace felt himself detached—not more humiliated than he had been before—that would have seemed out of the question—but detached, disinterested, like a spectator at a play. Hilda went on calmly, with the superficial calmness of a nature schooled to suppress everything betraying passion but the color in her cheek and the fire in her eye.

"And you haven't *found* us useful. Mama died—and I, as Charlie would say, have not made good. I've not played up. Let me say I might have done so if you hadn't been so eager to see me do it. I don't know. I can't tell. I've no taste for that sort of thing—and yet if I'd found that it would have helped Charlie—and I'd been allowed to do it of my own accord— I don't know. I can't tell. There wasn't time for me to attempt anything before I discovered that Charlie had married me for that purpose—"

"Oh no, Hilda. Be just."

"Well, *partly* for that purpose, then, Charlie. I suppose you won't object to my saying that. Didn't you tell me yourself—one day—inadvertently, I admit—that you'd been given to understand that a Hilda Penrhyn could put the man she married anywhere she liked in New York? I think those were the words. And I didn't do it. I didn't try to do it. I couldn't do it with Emma watching me, and you, Charlie, devoting your life to some one else.

It's hard enough to go scheming for petty and worthless things when one is driven to it by some commanding motive; but to have the motive snatched away and to be expected to do it just the same— Besides, I knew the things *were* petty and worthless. I knew it because I'd always had them—I'd had them to throw away—both in this country and in Europe. I knew how trivial the things you wanted me to work for were—how far beneath me—how far beneath *you*, if you'd only had the experience—"

Sir Osborne seemed to think it time for him to intervene. "I say, Hilda, what the devil's the use of going into all this?"

"I'm going into it to justify Emma—to justify you all. I quite see how disappointed you must be in me. I see how natural it is that you should want to begin all over again. The essence of your lives is your enterprise. When one thing has failed you try another. And now that I've failed you—"

"I've never said you'd failed me, Hilda," Charlie Grace broke in. "If there's any failure, it's been mine."

"That's your kind way of putting it, Charlie. I've no doubt that if I were to follow up the suggestion that's been made to me and—and give you your freedom, as it's called—you'd let me make use of all the fictitious devices that are arranged for such emergencies. You might even provide them—so that it should be I who would seem to seek to be released while you took the punishment. But in fact it would work the other way. I should take the punishment while you would go free. I and my children should be thrust into the background, almost without a name, while you would"—she

swayed slightly, holding with both hands to the back of the chair—"while you," she forced herself to go on, "would marry again—some one who'd carry out the ambitions to which I haven't lent myself—some one younger—and more attractive—with the necessary connections—and aspirations like your own—"

Charlie Grace seemed to himself to come alive at last. He stepped forward. "For God's sake, Hilda, cut it. Emma didn't mean the things you're attributing to her. None of us meant them. If she suggested that you might get a divorce, it was because she thought you'd like the chance of reconstructing your own happiness—"

"By marrying again. I! Thank you, Charlie. *Il ne manquait que cela.*"

"Well, whatever Emma's reason, it was a good reason. You may rest assured of that. But since the subject doesn't appeal to you, let us drop it—and never take it up again."

By this time Emma, too, had recovered herself. Rising, she came forward, and laid her hand on Hilda's arm. "Let me go with you to your room, dear," she said, soothingly. "You're overwrought, and I don't wonder at it. We get all kinds of ideas under an attack of nerves. I know I do. Come along now, and let Norah bring you a cup of tea."

To this motherly counsel Hilda might have objected had not the two men cut the situation short by strolling down the veranda steps. On the greensward below Sir Osborne could presently be seen offering his brother-in-law a cigar, which the latter lighted, sheltering the match with his hands.

CHAPTER III

AFTER what they considered the tactless nature of Hilda's remarks it was easiest for the two men to fall back on topics indifferent. As they strolled toward the edge of the steep, irregular bank Osborne plunged into the subject of the Jameson sale which had brought him to New York. Though he knew the theme was of no interest to Charlie Grace, he discussed with animation the examples of Utemaro and Hiroshige in the late Mr. Jameson's collection, comparing them unfavorably with his own. The Boston Museum of Fine Arts, he said, had recently paid him the compliment of sending a man to Montreal for the express purpose of inspecting his specimens of Hidemaro, and sounding him on the subject of parting with them. This he was resolved not to do. With Sir William Short's celebrated Corean potteries, and the T'ang figurines and Wan-li vases of other magnates of the T.-C. R., he, Sir Osborne, hoped to see Montreal soon lead the cities of the world in its treasures of Oriental art. It would be an excellent advertisement for the great railway system which had done so much to bring the East and the West together.

From this topic the transition was easy to that of business, and, once started in this direction, Sir Osborne could drop his brother-in-law a few salutary

hints as to the opinion held concerning him in high quarters in Montreal.

Charlie Grace followed with his eye the banner of black smoke flying in the wake of a steamer making its way down the Sound. "I know all that," he said, coolly. "I'm going to chuck it."

Sir Osborne's cigar executed a rapid movement toward the corner of his mouth. "Chuck it? What do you mean?"

"Send in my papers—resign—retire—give up the whole damn business. Oh, don't I see? I've muffed it here. Every one knows that. And before I'm politely asked to take a back seat I mean to do without any seat at all. You'll do me a favor, Osborne, by letting Sir William know that—so that he won't be in any devil of a rush. If he'll give me a little rope I'll hang myself of my own accord—which will do away with the need of unpleasantness."

Sir Osborne's cigar traveled slowly to a central position, then back to its place in the corner. He made no attempt to dispute his relative's conclusions. "B. & N. L. affair gave you an awful black eye," was his quiet response. "All felt you should have bottled up Ellis somehow. D'ye see?"

"How in thunder was I to do that, when he was in possession of all the facts from the start? Hadn't we adopted the very plans he himself had chalked out? The modifications we'd made in them didn't amount to that." He snapped his fingers. "Once he'd got wind of the thing he had nothing to do but sell his own ideas to the *Leader*—and we were down and out. Or, rather, I was down and out. To the T.-C. R. it was only a blow from a feather—but it was enough to break my back. I knew it would

happen the day I saw him skulking round the B. & N. L. offices. Found out afterward he'd been shadowing me for weeks. Had Hartman of the Connecticut Legislature on to it, too, so that as soon as the fuse was lighted the whole damn thing could blow up. Well, it blew up—and in the end I'm hoist with my own petard. I see that well enough; and that the wisest thing I can do is—go. Besides," he added, after a pause, "that's not the only reason."

"Other reason I suppose is—that girl. There's a silly business for a man of your age, if you like."

"No; it isn't the girl. In its way it's more serious than that—and that's serious enough, the Lord knows. It's this." He paused again. "I'm seedy. There's something wrong. I don't know what it is, but—there's something wrong."

Sir Osborne thought it the part of friendliness to take this lightly. "Oh, stow that, old man. *You're* all right. Hipped, by Jove, that's what *you* are. Do as you say. Send in your papers. Can afford it now. Get away. Go abroad. Get out of sight of that girl. Forget her. Then come back; and you and Hilda will go to housekeeping again as if nothing 'd happened. D'ye see? Why, there was a time—Sophy was a little 'un—fancy you never heard about that—happened in days when we hadn't much to say to the rectory—but there was a time when Emma got it into her head that I was fooling after a woman named Jost—Jost, was it?—well, no matter—nothing to it, d'ye see?—or hardly anything—but Emma was all nerves about it, just as Hilda is now. What 'd I do but—"

The reminiscence was cut short by a discreet

cough from Miss Tritton, the governess, who glided up behind to say that Mrs. Grace desired the gentlemen to know that Miss Hornblower was coming over from Idlewild to dinner, and would they kindly be dressed in time?

"Finish it later; good yarn," Sir Osborne confided, with a blink from beneath his Tam o' Shanter, while his cigar traversed with incredible speed the whole outline of his grizzled mouth.

Charlie Grace could never explain to his own satisfaction how it happened that after entering his room he found himself lying on the floor. Though he had been subject of late to spells of vertigo, there had on this occasion been no preliminary faintness, nor could he recall slipping or staggering or actually falling down. He was simply lying on the floor, clutching helplessly at a rug. He had no difficulty in getting up or in changing his clothes. His mind, too, worked with perfect clearness, unless there was, for a few minutes, a slight haziness regarding the lapse of time. He remembered sitting with Hilda, Emma, and Osborne on the veranda, and strolling with the last named on the bit of greensward above the cliff; but both events seemed to have happened a long while ago. That passed, however, and by the time he had dressed and gone down-stairs he was entirely himself. The circumstance would have been insignificant had it not puzzled him.

The dinner went off more easily than might have been expected. If Hilda was more silent than usual, she was so generally silent that no change could be detected. The company of Miss Hornblower and Miss Tritton relieved any tension the family circle might have felt had it been unbroken

by an outside presence, and there was no denying that Emma did wonders. The serenity of her conscience with regard to the charges—the hysterical charges, she called them, to herself—Hilda had brought enabled her to make allowances and be forgiving. Before going in to dinner she found a minute in which to whisper to her brother:

"She's all right now. I've talked to her. I'm sure she'll see how wrong it is of her to have such ridiculous fancies. Don't say anything to her about it. Best let it die out."

Later in the evening, when Fanny Hornblower went home, Charlie Grace walked up with her to Idlewild. It was a mild, moonlit evening, and they strolled slowly. They had scarcely passed into the road before he seized the opportunity to say:

"You spoke of taking Esther away with you. I wish you would."

The road lying under overhanging trees, it was too dark to see his features; but she turned toward him instinctively. "So you've come to it, too."

"Of course I've come to it, too. It was a foregone conclusion."

She still seemed to search his features through the darkness. "I wonder what it is—exactly—that makes you say so."

"I don't know that I could tell you—exactly. It's the whole thing."

"Can it be any change you've noticed in Hilda?"

"It's no *change* in her. It's nothing new that I've discovered—if that's what you want to know."

"Yes; that *is* what I want to know—because—

because *I've* discovered something. Or, rather, I've seen that something I suspected is true."

It was he who now tried to search her face. "Anything that has to do with me?"

"A great deal to do with you—only—I wish you could find it out for yourself. Perhaps you have. That's why I'm asking."

"Well, you needn't ask. I haven't. I haven't found out anything about Hilda in all the years we've been married—unless it is that I shall never find out anything at all."

"That's a pity, isn't it? But it's not altogether Hilda's fault. Her nature is like a beautiful bud that's been touched by an unexpected frost, and so never had a chance to open. She's shut right in on herself. The more deeply she feels the more she's impelled to keep the feeling hidden away. She would be so if she were happy; and she's still more so when she's suffering."

They had taken a few leisurely steps before he said: "Of course, I can't help seeing she suffers. But she doesn't suffer as much as she would if I'd ever—ever meant anything to her."

"I wonder if you know what you *have* meant to her—what you mean to her now."

"Vaguely. I don't know that I could put it to you in a way that you'd easily understand." He reflected a minute, searching for the right words. "To Hilda," he began, slowly, "I'm a man whom she married more or less by accident—partly through my own over-persuasion, partly through a series of circumstances unnecessary to go into. We both saw we'd made a mistake before a year was over; but, having made it, we've tried to stick by each

other loyally. I admire Hilda more than I can say. I don't quite know what she feels toward me; but, whatever it is, it isn't—love."

They passed the gate of the Idlewild property, into air heavy with the scents of lilacs and syringa. "Would it make any difference to you," she ventured, timidly, "to learn that it *is* love?—love of a very intense order?"

He chose an indirect response. "Isn't it a little late to go into that?"

"On the contrary—it may be just in time."

"Does that mean—?"

"It means," she said, hurriedly, "that there are a good many things about Hilda you've yet to learn—and one very important thing."

He considered this hint, possibly to avoid taking it. "If there was anything so very important I think I should have seen it."

"Not with Hilda. She's so proud—so perversely proud. She'd find it hard to admit that she loved you even if you loved *her*. But she'd rather die than acknowledge it when it's an open secret that you're in love with some one else." As he made no response to this, they walked on without speaking till they were in sight of the lights of the house, when she added, "But I think you ought to know, Charlie—and I'll take the responsibility of telling you, if you persist in not seeing it for yourself—that—"

"No; don't take the responsibility of telling me anything," he interrupted, quickly. "Exactly what Hilda feels or doesn't feel is for the time being beside the mark. The main thing is that I've decided to stand by her. If I had for a few minutes the hope of being free, it was only a dream. Nothing

could come of it, of course. So," he added, with difficulty, "if you'll only take Esther away I shall feel—safer."

"I've asked her already—and I think she'll come."

They were at the steps. He spoke huskily. "And do it pretty soon, will you, Fanny? I don't think it will be good for either of us to—to meet—very often."

"I want to go next week," she said, simply; and they bade each other good night.

On returning to his own house he skirted the grounds so as to reach the veranda overlooking the Sound, where they had been sitting in the afternoon. He needed to be alone—to smoke and think. Through the open parlor window he could see Emma and Osborne reading the New York evening papers. He supposed Hilda must have gone to her room.

It was not altogether a pleasure to him to find her, wrapped in a thick white shawl, seated in one of the wicker veranda chairs. She, too, apparently, needed to think. She said nothing, and made no motion as he approached, thus throwing the onus of the situation on him. As he took one of the other chairs and lighted a cigar he could think of nothing to relieve the awkwardness of the moment but to remark on the beauty of the moonlit Sound, with its spangling of faint lights.

Ignoring this effort to keep to neutral themes, she said at once, "Charlie, I've been thinking over what you want—and I can't do it."

He rose, threw the extinguished match over the railing of the veranda, and came back to his seat. "What is it that I want?" he asked, then.

"You want me to set you free, don't you?"

"I thought we weren't going to revert to that."

"I don't see how we can help it—this once, at any rate. I think you ought to let me justify myself for so humiliating an act as holding a man—even a husband—against his will."

"I don't think it's fair to say it's against my will till you've some better reason than any you have now —that I know about."

"Well, *isn't* it against your will?"

The question required long pondering. "I don't see, Hilda," he said, at last, in a reasoning tone, "that we shall gain anything by too close a scrutiny of each other's motives. Since we're to remain together—"

"You'd rather it rested on the simple fact that I won't let you go."

"I'm just as willing that it should be on the assumption that—all things considered—I don't choose to go."

He could see an impatient movement of her hand under her shawl. "No, please, Charlie! Don't let us have any fictions. It's too late to flatter a woman with chivalrous conventionalities when she comes—where I am now. Let us have the truth. We're going to remain together—as far as it is together—because I won't release you. Isn't that it?"

He was silent.

"And since that *is* it, I think you ought to see that I have motives on my side as commanding—and as reasonable—as any you have on yours."

"I'm not questioning that, Hilda."

She seemed to brace herself. "I don't think love is everything—either your love or mine. You may love—where you like—and I may love where I like—

but there still remain conditions to which both your love and mine must be subservient."

"Quite true."

"Our marriage may have been a mistake—a wretched mistake—and yet I don't see that we can rectify such mistakes as that by turning our backs on them, and pretending we can begin again, when life has to be consecutive. I suppose that's what the Church means when it speaks of the indissolubility of marriage. I believe in that, Charlie."

He took his cigar from his lips to say, "I'm willing to consider our marriage to be quite as indissoluble—as it seems to you."

"That is, you're resigned to the situation. I don't think I am; but I'm *convinced*. If there was nothing else to convince me, there would be the children. The fact that we don't love each other—"

He was about to protest against this assertion, but decided to let it go. It seemed to him that she read his impulse, and waited a perceptible instant for him to act upon it. When he didn't her voice became a shade colder, as she repeated:

"The fact that we don't love each other ought not to be visited on them. They have their rights—rights which we can't overlook. It seems to me that, once they're in the world, our happiness becomes secondary to theirs. Perhaps that's harder for a man to agree to than a woman—"

"N-no." After a puff or two at his cigar he added, "No man with any sense of the decencies wants to be a hound."

She took a few minutes to consider this. "That's putting our situation very clearly, Charlie," she said, then. "I won't give you up, because I want my

children to have a father; and you won't abandon us, because you don't want to be a hound. That's getting us down to the irreducible minimum, isn't it?"

He felt obliged to protest at last, though he did it somewhat lamely. "I should think we might allow ourselves a little more margin than that."

She leaned forward, throwing the shawl back from her hands and arms. Her eyes were so eager that he could catch their gleam. "A margin made of—what, Charlie?"

Getting up from his chair, he went to the edge of the veranda, knocking off the ash of his cigar. The act gave him time to think. On turning he leaned against the veranda rail, looking down at her. Remembering what Fanny Hornblower had just been hinting at, he would have been glad to throw something like ardor into his voice had he not believed honesty to be essential to the situation. "A margin of—of mutual respect," he said, at last.

It was as if all sorts of fires suppressed within her blazed suddenly into scorn. "Respect!" She threw the shawl completely from her shoulders, leaving her neck and bosom bare. "Respect, Charlie! Surely that's the last thing!"

"I don't see that."

"How can you respect a woman who holds you by the mere quibble of a legal right when your whole heart is straining to get away?"

"That's not a fair way of putting it. I do respect you. I honor you as I don't honor any one else in the world."

"Then we'll let that pass. But how can I respect a man who has never, since I knew him, considered

any other human being except as a tool to be made use of—and flung aside? How can I respect a man who knew his own mind so little as to pursue me for years—and persuade me to marry him, when he knew I had no faith in him—and who realized within a month or two that he didn't want me? How can I respect a man who by his open preference for another woman—not to put it more harshly than that—has made me a by-word and an object of pity to all who knew me? If I don't feel more bitterly toward you, Charlie, it's because I blame myself for having married you. As I used to tell you in the days when you kept asking me, I'm one of the women who should never have married at all. I've always had a distrust of men. When I was young, and they came about me, I could see that, though they were theoretically honest, they were practically base. Instinct made me afraid of them. It made me afraid of you. However much I cared for you—and I *did* care for you—I shouldn't have married you if I hadn't been caught where your kindness seemed to make it the right thing to do. I knew you'd make me unhappy—and you've done it." She rose and went up to him, laying her hands on his shoulders, and looking him in the eyes. "Oh, Charlie, how can I respect you? Surely you must see that if we're to go on we must find some other basis than that!"

"Well—what?"

"Isn't there anything you can think of?"

He would have given much for the power of speaking the word he knew she was waiting for. But his heart was dull. It had just bidden silent farewell to Esther Legrand, whom he had sworn to

himself never to see again if he could help it. For the minute it was all the effort he could make. As she stood with her hands on his shoulders he avoided her eyes, looking over her head toward the house.

"I'm willing to accept any condition you lay down," he said, at last. Then, as she did not speak at once: "What is it to be?"

She withdrew her hands, throwing out her arms with a fatalistic gesture and letting them drop heavily against her sides. "What *can* it be but that which we've said already? I keep you for the children's sake; and you stay—so as not to be a hound."

CHAPTER IV

AND so during the next few weeks a new pact between Charlie Grace and his wife got itself established. It was a pact which, for several reasons, worked better than might have been expected. Making up his mind to be more with his family, the husband and father found domestic habits asserting their tranquil authority. The home ceased to be alien; Billy and Milly became his own. Remaining at the bungalow as much of the time as he could spare from the office, he knew the pleasures of proprietorship in spring. Tramping about his twenty acres, he threw himself into the tasks of digging and planting and mulching and making the beginner's horticultural mistakes, so that air, exercise, and the necessity of mastering subjects he knew nothing about worked off some of his nervousness. Besides, the problems of the garden, together with the ever-talked-of possibility of building a new house, afforded an excuse for having Ralph Coningsby come down every two or three nights from New York. Hilda liked Ralph Coningsby. Bearing him no ill will for having been the instrument of saddling her with the absurd little house in Seventy-fifth Street which she had been obliged to turn into a home, she liked him for his sincerity, his open countenance, his good manners, and the sympathy which came from his having the European point of view like herself.

Charlie Grace liked him, too—liked him for some of the foregoing reasons, but mainly because he was the rejected lover of Esther Legrand. The fact that each had his special reason for thinking of her brought to the mind of the older man an element of solace into their companionship, as they wandered from one hilltop to another looking for building sites.

For Esther Legrand was now on the shores of the Gulf of St. Lawrence with Miss Hornblower—the circumstance contributing its own quality of relief to the general situation. Charlie Grace could thus go up to New York and attend to his business without the hourly temptation to concoct ridiculous errands that would take him to Vandiver Place. Hilda could see him go without eating her heart out at home, while she speculated as to the minute he would be with her, and how they would meet, and what they would say. When he came back she could smile with something that had an odd resemblance to happiness instead of meeting him with mournful questioning eyes. Even Billy dropped some of his guardedness toward his papa, treating him frankly as man should treat man.

There was more still. When obliged to spend two or three consecutive days in New York, Charlie Grace got into the habit of asking his wife to leave the children with Miss Tritton and keep him company. He did this, partly because he hoped that they might thus grow together again, partly because it pleased her, and partly because he was nervous and out of sorts. He made light of his indisposition when Hilda questioned him about it, and refused to see a doctor; but he was worried at heart. It came

to him at times that if he could only see Esther he would get better at once; but he was resolute in putting that thought away.

What he could not put away, however, was the shadow of the man Ellis meeting him at every turn. Shabby, silent, ghostly, inoffensive except for its mere presence, it passed his doorway at the minute when he came out, or it was in the hall of the great building in which the T.-C. R. had its offices, or it stood opposite the club or restaurant where he went for his luncheon, or it dogged him a few yards behind, or on the other side of the street, when he took a walk. There had been a time when the expression of the eyes had been baleful, when Charlie Grace had gone in fear of a stab or a shot. But that fire went out after the series of articles in the New York *Leader* exposing the designs of the T.-C. R. on the B. & N. L. and rousing the alarm of powerful interests in the states of Connecticut and New York. After that Ellis grew tame, timid even, slinking into sight and out of sight like a whipped, spiritless animal.

It was so that he appeared one midday toward the end of June, gliding among the rare foot-passengers on the sunny side of Fifth Avenue while Charlie Grace, wearing the lightest of suits and a straw hat, strolled on the other side, in the shade. It was a day when, having had business up-town, it occurred to him to lunch at home, taking the little gentle exercise he felt his health required on the way there. He had always been a rapid walker; but of late walking brought on a curious loss of breath.

He was just before the door of the Restaurant

Blitz when the quick movement of a red parasol in front of him and the cry of a hearty voice arrested his attention. "Why!"

He echoed the exclamation. "Why, Hattie!"

"Where on earth have you sprung from? Haven't seen you for years."

There followed a series of explanations, given with a little difficulty on both sides. Nevertheless, Hattie felt at liberty to pout prettily and look injured.

"Well, I do think you might have hunted me up now and then. Oh yes, I know. Married man with a family and all that!—but I'm not so terribly compromising, now am I? Goodness knows, I live quietly enough. Reggie's kept the lid on me as if I was in a harem."

"Then it's agreed with you—for you never looked better."

He felt obliged to say this because, as a matter of fact, Hattie had lost much of her beauty. She was stouter, her features had broadened, and her complexion, where cosmetics allowed it to be seen, had coarsened. Time had dimmed, too, her lovely, mischievous eyes, turning their roguery into a sidelong glance full of dread. She was well dressed, however, in a flowered muslin, in the height of the fashion of the day. A little winged hat perched on her unnaturally blond hair like a bird poised for flight, also in the style of that year.

"I suppose you're married now." He knew she wasn't, but he said this because he could think of nothing else.

"Oh, get along, Charlie. Not but what I might be. You've no idea of what's been happening to

me. If you'd only come to see me I would have told you."

"Well, tell me now."

"How can I?—right here in the street?—under this blazing sun? Who's that over there? He gives me the creeps."

Charlie Grace glanced across the street. "Oh, you needn't mind him. His name's Ellis. He's a little cracked, I think."

"Cracked? Good gracious! I can't stand here with a cracked man eying me like a lost soul. I'm hungry, anyway. I was just going in to have something to eat. Come along and let me feed you. I'll stand treat."

There were so many obvious reasons for making an excuse, and each reason so obviously a reflection on poor Hattie, that he hesitated to put any of them forth. Nevertheless, he was doing his best to withdraw gracefully when she said:

"Oh, if you're going to hum and haw like that I shall do without the pleasure of your company. It 'll be a real deprivation, too, for I want your advice awfully. That is, I want your advice, though I've made up my mind. I only want you to tell me I'm right. So what do you say? Is it How-do-you-do? or Good-by? It's got to be one or the other, for I'm broiling in this sun—and I'm scared of the cracked man over the way."

Since there was no resisting this appeal, he followed her in.

"I'm going to order this bean-feast," she informed him, when they were seated at a corner table, where she considerately allowed him to turn his back on

the main part of the room while she confronted it. "I'm going to give you—h'm—let me see—"

She ran her eye over the menu, making her choice with the ease of the person seasoned to restaurant habits. The maître d'hôtel, with a deferential stoop of his shoulders, took down her orders—truite au bleu, poulet en casserole, Camembert, fraises à la crème, demi-tasse, Johannisberg Cabinet—as she made her selections.

This business out of the way, she put up her veil, pulled off her gloves, clasped her hands on the table, and, leaning forward nonchalantly, examined her guest.

"Well, life doesn't seem to be all beer and skittles for you, Charlie, any more than for the rest of us," she observed, as the result of her scrutiny. "I never saw such a woebegone face for a man who can't be quite forty, not since I was born."

He smiled. "I'm sorry. I thought I'd cheered up a bit since seeing you."

"Oh, I didn't expect anything so flattering as that. In fact—you won't mind my saying it, will you?—you don't seem to be enjoying yourself at all. I wish you were, because it's a real treat to me to see *you*, old boy. There's none of the old crowd that I could begin to stand but you—and Reggie, of course," she added, as an afterthought. "Reggie's changed a good deal lately—for the better."

"There was room for that, wasn't there?" he thought himself privileged to say.

It seemed to him that her expression grew more serious. "Oh, Reggie's not so bad. I don't say he's always treated me quite right; and he's certainly shilly-shallied about things I wanted — once; but he's not the cad some fellows are—not by a lot."

HE HAD TURNED,—TO SEE HILDA

"It's something to be able to say that much."

"And now he's really trying to turn over a new leaf."

He grew curious. "A new leaf—to what extent?" He tried to put the case politely. "Not to such a degree as would—affect you, I hope."

She crumbled a bit of bread. "Well—y-yes. I should be included."

He still tried to express himself with delicacy. "To your advantage, I trust."

She played scales with her left hand on the tablecloth. "That's what I want to ask your advice about. You'll hardly believe me when I tell you what I've made up my mind to do. You'll think me an awful fool—which I am. And yet if you do think me a fool I hope you won't say so. You see, I want you to tell me I'm right whether you believe it or not."

"I see. It's a very natural way of seeking counsel. Only every one is not as frank about the method as you, Hattie."

"Oh, I'm frank. I see things with my eyes wide open, too. Perhaps it would be better for me if I didn't; but I do."

A catch in her voice caused him to glance up quickly. He could have sworn there was a shimmer of tears in her fine eyes. A tear, in fact, hung like a dewdrop on one of her dark lashes. He felt oddly moved.

"Look here, Hattie," he said, conscious of the indiscretion of his inquiry; "he's good to you, isn't he?—still?"

She flicked away the tear with her hand. "Oh, Lord, yes. It's the other way round. But here's

the trout. I can't tell you just now. We'll eat; and talk about it later."

The truite au bleu was served—silver-gray, innocent, delicate—a morsel for a princess in a fairy tale. In glasses of the evanescent green of the first springtide grass the Johannisberg Cabinet was of the crystal clarity only seen in the saffron shades of sunset. Charlie Grace and Hattie Bright, mindful perhaps of early privations, ate and drank with a kind of reverence—a reverence that moved the former to raise his glass and say with smiling wistfulness:

"Here's to old St. David's, Hattie, and Vandiver Place."

She, too, raised her glass, but for the minute it was destined not to reach her lips. She held it poised; she held it as if her hand had been suddenly paralyzed; her eyes turned toward the door.

"What's the matter?" her companion asked, setting the glass he had drained down on the table. "You look as if you were seeing a ghost."

"I am," she said, quietly, without taking her gaze from the doorway. "There's a lady coming in—No, don't look round!—she's asking for you, I think—and I'm almost sure it's—Mrs. Grace."

He felt the blood rushing back to his heart. "Oh, nonsense!" he tried to say, but his tongue failed him.

"It *is* Mrs. Grace," Hattie continued, in a dead voice. "I've only seen her once—but I'm very nearly sure. What can I do? I must be got out of this. No; it's too late. She knows all about me and who I am. Fanny's told her. The head waiter is bringing her over. For God's sake, Charlie, what are you going to say? It's no use saying anything.

Your face is like a sheet. Oh, brace up, man! You'll make her believe—"

But he had turned. He had turned to see Hilda, all in white, except for a black hat, threading her way between the tables and coming toward them. The impulse to make a dash for it was counteracted by one of anger that she should spy upon him thus and track him down. It was in this spirit he rose, holding by the back of his chair and turning half round, as she approached. Hattie Bright, too, rose, the old beauty of expression coming back to her in the moment of humiliation and helplessness.

Led by the maître d'hôtel, Hilda was within a few yards of their table before she actually saw them. She hesitated, then, in a brief instant of embarrassment. It was only an instant—just long enough to collect her forces as woman of the world. He saw then that whatever her astonishment she put it momentarily aside in order to meet this public emergency with spirit. He knew by her smile that she would ignore the fact that Hattie was what she was.

"Oh, Charlie, I'm so sorry to be late. I came the very minute I got your message. Eugene happened to have the motor at the door, and I only put on a hat. But I'm glad you didn't wait for me." She turned to Hattie, holding out her hand. "And this is Mrs. Bright. I know you and Charlie are old friends. Fanny Hornblower told me the other day that you and she and Charlie were all confirmed together. Sha'n't we sit down? I'll begin wherever you are."

A third chair being brought and a third place laid, they sat down. "We'd only just begun," Charlie Grace found voice to say.

Fortunately, there was a remaining truite au bleu, so that Hilda could be served at once. She talked of the message she had received. It must have been delayed in transmission from the office, she said, since Charlie had had time to come all the way up from lower Broadway. No; she hadn't taken it at the telephone herself; a housemaid had done that. It was one of the gentlemen at Mr. Grace's office, the maid reported, who called up to say that Mr. Grace would be glad if Mrs. Grace would join him and a lady friend at lunch at the Blitz as soon as possible. That was all. She had come on the instant, waiting only to put on a hat, Eugene having the motor at the door.

During this account there were instants when Charlie Grace endeavored to break in and explain that he hadn't sent any message at all; but at each of such moments Hattie was able to make him some desperate signal with the lips or the eyes to hold his peace. As to the innocence of Hilda's move neither he nor she could feel wholly at ease, and yet it was patent, to her at least, that if Mrs. Grace could only believe that they had invited her to join them their own position was assured. It was impossible to glance at Hattie without seeing that she was never in so uncomfortable a situation in her life. She continued to nibble at her truite au bleu, but she might have been eating grass.

Even more could have been said of Charlie Grace. For him the truite au bleu *was* grass; he couldn't eat it at all. Had it not been for the Johannisberg Cabinet his nerve would have failed him utterly. By way of helping out a conversation of some sort he told incoherently how he had had business up-

town, how he had decided to go home to lunch, how he had been walking slowly along Fifth Avenue, and how—but Hattie's dumb, piteous signals, while Hilda's eyes happened to be turned to her plate, arrested him. As plainly as words could express it she was saying: "For God's sake, Charlie, don't give the show away!" so that he stopped as incoherently as he had begun.

It was then that Hattie had her inspiration. It came with a flash, as could be seen in the sudden clearing of her face. Once having got the main idea, she plunged in boldly, trusting to luck for the details. It was a juncture at which one was obliged to trust to luck, since there was no leisure for thinking a subject out.

"And then he met me, Mrs. Grace. It was just an accident. And yet if it had been an answer to prayer I couldn't have met any one I wanted to see more. For the last month or two I've been wishing and wishing I could get in a word with him."

Hilda looked up with soft, interested eyes. Her husband thought he had never seen her so pretty or so young. Neither had he ever admired her more than in this trying minute, when she had sunk all hesitations and questionings to show herself a lady in the truest senses of the word. It was the sort of rising to the occasion that appealed to him.

"How *nice!*" was all Hilda said, but the tone made it enough.

Hattie felt encouraged to go on. "Yes; wasn't it? I *do* want his advice so much. You see, Charlie—I mean, Mr. Grace—"

"Oh, call him Charlie if you like."

"Well, he's one of the oldest friends I've got—

and one of the truest. That means a lot to me, Mrs. Grace. He may be what you like—I don't care—he's a true friend—and *has* been since he was so high. And when you can say that of a man—whatever his faults—and I don't say he hasn't got them—"

Hilda smiled as she helped herself to the poulet en casserole. "No; nor I."

"But when you *can* say that of a man—you say a lot. Don't you? A man is like an apple, I always say. When it's sound at heart, you can put up with a few spots on the outside. With a woman, I suppose, it's different; she can be what she likes at heart so long as the outside is rosy and smooth. But I've had more to do with men, and I've got to know them. And Charlie—Mr. Grace—is one of the truest—in *spite* of his faults."

A faint color stole back into the hero's cheek. He began to admire Hattie, too. Who knew but she might yet carry off the situation? "I should like your kind words a little better, Hattie," he laughed, applying himself to the chicken, "if you didn't keep harping so much on my weaknesses."

Hattie ignored this to continue the conversation with Hilda. "And when I found myself in this peculiar situation—in which I *am*, Mrs. Grace—a very peculiar situation—I thought there was no one whose advice I should like better than his. I don't want him to tell me what to do; I've made up my mind about that already. I want him to tell me I'm right—because in many ways I know I'm a fool."

Hilda smiled again, the old dreamy smile her husband had not seen for a long time. "I hope he'll come up to your expectations."

"And so," Hattie went on, "when I found him passing the door here, as I was coming in, I couldn't help nabbing him on the spot. I just couldn't help it. Oh, he tried to get away—but I wouldn't let him. And then—" Her tone changed; she took on the pitiful look charged with a dash of roguery which was still effective. "And then, Mrs. Grace, I did an awful thing. I don't know if you'll ever forgive it. Something told me that you might help me, too. You know Fanny so well—and you've lived so much abroad—and all that. I—I telephoned to you. Yes; it was me. Did I say it was from the office? Well, perhaps I did. I was so flustered over it that I don't know what I said. I just told the young man who called up your house to say anything that came into my head. I'm like that, as you can see. Oh, Charlie didn't want me to," she declared, fixing big innocent eyes on the man, who, judging from his countenance, was groping wildly after his own cue in this extraordinary tale. Perhaps she saw this, for she said, at once: "Now, don't you speak. You didn't want me to drag Mrs. Grace into the thing at all—but I just *felt* she'd help me. I think that, as a rule, men feel more for women than other women do; but now and again you realize that a woman will understand you as a man can't. Don't you think so, Mrs. Grace?"

Hilda having assented to this, Hattie went on. "And now I'll come to the point. You clear out," she added to the waiter, who stood nearer than she cared for. "Go and see that that Camembert is good—ripe, but not too ripe. The last time it had run to oil. I'll come to the point," she continued,

turning again to her guests. "Fanny wants Reggie to marry me."

Looking at his wife, Charlie Grace saw the faintest flush of color in her cheek, and the same degree of embarrassment in her manner. It was the first time in her life she had come into contact with this special situation. Her eyes were on her knife and fork as she said: "Yes; so she's told me."

"She says," Hattie pursued, "that after all these years I'm Reggie's wife before God."

There was a perceptible pause before Hilda said, with eyes still downcast, "I should think there might be that way of looking at it."

"Well, it's not mine," Hattie said, bluntly. "I'm *not* his wife before God. I'm not his wife before any one." Having allowed this statement to sink in, she added: "And I'm not going to be."

Hilda being unprepared to comment on this decision, Charlie Grace felt it incumbent on him to furnish a remark. "I should think that might be a disappointment to Reggie," was the best he found himself able to do.

"It 'll be more of a disappointment to me," Hattie declared, promptly. "It's what I've looked forward to for more years than I can count—and now I'm going to turn it down. Can you imagine a woman being such a fool?"

"Wouldn't that depend on her motive?" Hilda suggested, shyly.

"My motive is that Reggie's trying to turn over a new leaf—and I'm not going to be the one to stop him."

Charlie Grace raised his eyebrows. "Wouldn't

part of the turning of the new leaf be—in what Fanny proposes?"

Hattie continued to be blunt. "No, it wouldn't. Reggie couldn't turn over a new leaf with me. What difference could a few prayers and a ring make to us? I don't want to say anything against the prayers; but the ring would be ridiculous—now. It might please me to have it on my finger; but it would only chain Reggie to the past. There's too much onion in this casserole," she complained to the waiter, who was passing the dish for the second time. "I've spoken of that before. Aren't cooks funny?" she continued, addressing herself specially to Hilda. "Onion is one of the things they never know how to use properly. It's either too much or none at all. And it's the past he's trying to break away from, poor boy. He's tried to break away from it before," she went on, tearfully, "but I was in the way. He couldn't get beyond me or over me or through me. And so he felt it was no use. He's weak, Reggie is; but he has his good points."

"You're fond of him?" Hilda queried, tremulously.

"Yes, God help me." Hattie laughed, though tears quivered on her lashes. "It's queer the way the tables are turned. There was a time when he was more fond of me than I was of him; and now it's the other way round. When he was fond of me he wouldn't—he wouldn't do—what Fanny wants us to do; and now that he—doesn't care so much—he's ready to. Isn't that queer?"

"That is," Hilda said, "you're both coming to see things—differently. We do as we grow older. As far as Fanny is concerned—"

Hattie fanned herself with the menu. "Oh, Fanny's at the bottom of the whole thing—with both of us. If I'm going to be a fool—and I am—it's because she's made me one. If she'd only opposed the thing—as any other woman in the world would have done—I'd have carried Reggie off under her very nose—if I could. But she's *so* good, and *so* sweet, that I just can't take her at her word. I—just—can't."

The break in Hattie's voice brought a misty radiance into Hilda's eyes. "I know she'd love you—like a sister."

"Oh, I know she would. But she's not the only one. I guess I can love like a sister, too—if I'm put to it. There are sisters you'd just as soon see out of the way—and I'm going."

"You're going, Hattie?" Charlie Grace asked, in some anxiety. "Where?"

Hattie spoke resolutely. "I'm going abroad. I've never been abroad, and I've always wanted to go. Now I shall get my way."

Hilda looked at her pityingly. "You're going alone?"

Hattie nodded. "Any one who'd come with me I shouldn't want. And any one I should want wouldn't come with me. I shall have to make the best of my own company. Fanny's in Prince Edward Island—that's where my father and mother came from—and Reggie's in Europe. They'll be back by the beginning of September, expecting to find me. But they won't. The nest 'll be empty. I shall have taken the southern route to Naples."

The strawberries were passed and partaken of in silence. Each of the three had special matter

for thought. That Hattie found it difficult to disentangle the true from the fictitious elements in her tale was evident to Charlie Grace when she said: "It's because I'm going to Europe that I thought of you, Mrs. Grace. You know so much about the countries over there. I thought you might be able to tell me of some place where I could live quietly—and not attract attention. I shall call myself Mrs. Pillsbury—a widow. That's what I am. Mr. Pillsbury *is* dead," she informed Charlie Grace. "The last time I mentioned him to you I wasn't sure; but I've found out. So that I'm quite a widow."

"I could let you have a number of addresses," Hilda said, earnestly, "and tell you all sorts of things to do. And if you ever went to Nice I could give you letters to my friends Canon and Mrs. Langhorne. They're darlings—and they'd be *so* good to you."

Hattie grew thoughtful. "I should like that. I want to get back to church again. I miss it. I do go sometimes—to St. Agnes's. The preaching is very good, and the music is lovely. Of course I can only accept as much of the sermon as I can—apply; but the singing always comforts me. It takes me back."

Later, as they were saying good-by in the outer hall of the restaurant, Hattie displayed the same confusion between fact and invention. "You'll never forgive me, Mrs. Grace, for calling you up. It's the most unwarranted thing I ever did. But, of course, if Charlie hadn't happened here I shouldn't have dreamed of such a thing. After all, when a woman is unhappy she's a right to call any one her

friend, hasn't she? It's unhappiness that makes the whole world kin, I always say."

It seemed to Charlie Grace that as his wife took Hattie's hand in both her own her face kindled. "You've done me the greatest honor I've ever had in my life," he could hear her say. "It's inconceivable that any one could have turned to *me* for help. I can't tell you what it means to me. It's as though something in me had been unlocked—and I'd been set free."

As Hilda passed first through the revolving door into the street, Hattie had time to whisper: "She's the loveliest thing God ever made. Shall you ever forget the way she turned to me and said, 'And this is Mrs. Bright'?—so natural—just as if I was —anybody else. Charlie Grace, if you ever give me away about the lie I've told her—"

A shake of his head and a pursing of his lips reassured her, for, as Hilda looked back, there was no time to say more. On the pavement they shook hands again, while Hattie entered one of the restaurant motors and rolled away. As the vehicle swept to the middle of the street Charlie Grace caught sight of Ellis shambling off from the edge of the opposite pavement.

"That's it, by George," he said to himself. "That's where the message came from. He thought he'd got me into a trap; and so he would have if—"

But Hilda had taken her place in another of the house motors, and he had to follow her. As he seated himself by her side he saw she was wiping away tears.

"That's a good woman, Charlie," she said, half sobbing.

"And you're a better one," he declared, fervently. "By God, Hilda, you've been a trump."

"What else could I do in a public place like that? Besides, I knew you must have some good reason in asking me to come."

With an ardor he had not shown her in many weeks he drew her to him and kissed her.

Turning to peer through the little window at the back, he could see Ellis's shrunken figure doddering down the street.

"He thought he'd got me at last! Poor devil! He must have seen by the way we shook hands with Hattie how well the trick worked."

But the results of Ellis's revenge were not yet made wholly manifest.

CHAPTER V

THAT evening Charlie Grace found himself on the floor of the library, while his wife bent over him, crying: "Charlie! Charlie! What's the matter?"

He was sure he hadn't been unconscious, and, as on the former occasion, he could remember no preliminaries to his fall, except a little dizziness. To Hilda's frenzied questioning he was able to reply coolly, "Nothing; nothing," while he raised himself and got up. Having brushed the dust from the sleeves and front of his dinner-jacket, he dropped into the nearest arm-chair. Hilda sank to her knees beside him, seizing his hands.

"Oh, what is it, Charlie? I was on the stairs—and heard you fall. Aren't you hurt? You fell so heavily. What is it?"

"Nothing, nothing," he assured her. "I've done it before. It doesn't mean anything. It's just —a trick."

"No; it's more than that. You're not telling me everything. You're suffering. You're ill."

It was to give her courage that he said: "I'm not ill. I'm only—out of sorts."

She clung to him beseechingly. "Are you out of sorts because you're—unhappy?"

"Why do you ask me that?"

"Because—oh, because, Charlie, I think it's so."

His head sank till his chin rested on his shirt-front. He avoided her imploring eyes by staring at the floor. "Even if it was so," he muttered, in order to give her an answer of some sort, "it wouldn't help matters to discuss it. So please don't let us talk of it any more."

"How do you know it won't help matters? You surely wouldn't be unhappy—and shut me out of your unhappiness."

"I wouldn't shut you out if it would do any good to let you in. But it wouldn't. I shall be all right in a day or two. I'm all right now."

He tried to put her from him so as to rise, but she clung the more desperately. "No, Charlie. You're not all right now. You'll not be all right in a day or two. It's deeper than that. Suppose—" she drew back from him slightly, taking his face between her hands and raising his head so as to make him look at her—"suppose you *couldn't* keep me out—that I was—was in—already?"

"Well? What then?"

"Then you couldn't keep me from sharing your—your trouble"—she stumbled at the word—"could you?"

"I don't need to try, Hilda, darling—because you can't. If there *is* a trouble—and I don't say there is, mind you—it's one I've got to put through alone."

"We'll see." She rose from her knees and went aimlessly to the other side of the room. "We'll see," she said, again.

He lifted his head. His face betrayed some curiosity. "We'll see—what?"

She stood with finger-tips just touching the top

of the Renaissance desk, whch occupied the space between them. "I don't know but"—her tone grew firmer—"but we shall see—something. I'm your wife, Charlie. No one can take away my right to love you—and—and—help you—to the uttermost." She seemed to remember that only a few weeks earlier she had refused to help him, for she added, quickly: "Now that I see how you're suffering."

He got up, with a deadness of limb he managed to conceal from her, and crossed the room to where she stood. "You don't see how I'm suffering," he said, laying his hands on her shoulders, and looking with kindly intentness into her eyes. "You see only what you read into me. But if you're right at all, Hilda, and you do want to help me, you'll be most successful in never speaking to me about it again. Will you promise me that?"

She continued to stand meekly, with his hands on her shoulders, while she meditated her reply. "Yes," she said, at last, with some firmness; "I *will* promise that."

The next day Hilda was obliged to return to the bungalow and the children, while Charlie Grace remained in town. He was the less reluctant to see her go because of having made up his mind that the moment had come for consulting Dr. Furnival. He did so that afternoon, taking his place in the waiting-room with three or four other patients and whiling away the hours with the comic papers and odd copies of the previous year's magazines.

It was part of the confidence Dr. Furnival inspired that he grudged no time to those who consulted him. Even to the bored occupants of the anteroom there

was something impressive in the lengthy conferences —silent, mysterious, oracular—to which each of their number was summoned in turn. The very entries and exits were awed, discreet, like those to and from the confessional. It was difficult for Charlie Grace to realize that the oracle approached so reverently was no other than his old friend, Freddy Furnival, of whom he knew so many of the intimate secrets of early years, and whose present life, in its more private aspects, was, according to Hattie Bright, so droll.

None the less, he felt some reverence when his own turn came to enter the quiet room. It was a large square room with a desk in the middle of the floor. The doctor's revolving chair and the patient's chair at the corner of the desk were the only pieces of furniture not ranged carefully along the sides. This solemnly spacious effect was heightened by the thick blue-red-and-green Turkey rug, deadening the footfall. Furny sat so as to have the light from two long, curtained windows behind him and full on the face of his patients.

He rose from his place at the desk as Charlie Grace entered. He had grown stouter and stockier with the years. His full round face, lighted by his large round glasses rather than by his small round eyes, and adorned with a stubby, closely clipped brown mustache, had a rubicund look of youth. It was, nevertheless, a learned face, like that of some wise young Swiss professor. His greeting was cordial, while it preserved the professional decorum the moment called for.

"Hello, Charlie. Glad to see you. Sit down."

Furny's voice was against him. It was thin and

high, with a tendency to squeak in moments of exasperation or emphasis.

On taking his seat Charlie Grace plunged at once into the subject that had brought him, describing his symptoms and the worry they had caused him with a certain luxury of relief in speaking out. He told of dizziness, of thirst, of headache, of restless nights, of days of lassitude, and of the two occasions when he had fallen down. These details being so important, it disturbed him to find Freddy give them what looked like an indifferent attention. He was, in fact, chiefly occupied in finding his place in a ledgerlike volume, in which he wrote.

"Let me see," he broke in; "there's a G. in your name, isn't there?"

Charlie Grace admitted that his middle name was Gunnison.

"And you were born in—?"

"1869."

"Yes, of course. So was I. You're a little the older, aren't you?"

"I was born in January."

"And I in May. So that you're in your thirty-ninth year, like me." He continued to write. "Your father's name was William Grace, and he died of—"

"Bright's disease."

"At the age of—?"

"Seventy-three."

"And your mother?"

"Her name was Millicent Grace. She was thirty-six. I've been told she died of what they call pernicious anemia."

There followed a series of minute questions, the replies to which were carefully noted. After this

the doctor felt the patient's pulse, looked at his tongue, and listened to his heart—again making notes in the ledgerlike volume. When they had taken their seats once more Furny assumed the purely non-committal air that comes to members of his profession, especially in difficult moments, like the protective coloring developed by animals living in dangerous habitats. It was this, perhaps, that gave Charlie Grace his first inkling of alarm. If the case were not grave, he argued, Furny wouldn't be so careful to seem expressionless. He was thinking primarily of this while the physician prescribed, at great length and with much minutiæ of detail, the course to be followed—a diet in which it seemed to the patient there was nothing left to eat at all, the free use of alkaline waters, rest from work, freedom from worry, and the spending of the next winter, at least, in an equable climate—Florida, California, or the south of France.

Charlie Grace was indignant. "But I simply can't do it. I can't get away."

The doctor smiled indulgently, as one who was familiar with the protest. "My dear boy, you *must* do it—you *must* get away."

"Do you mean to say it's as bad as all that?"

The doctor continued to smile. "It's quite as bad as all that—if you call that bad. Lots of fellows would be glad of the excuse to get off."

"And how long should I have to keep it up?"

Freddy was prepared with his answer, delivering it with the ease of one who has often said the same thing before. "We can tell that better when we see the effect. I shall want you to come again in three or four days' time, after I've made—"

"Then you think it looks—serious?"

"Oh, everything's serious. If it wasn't, we doctors would be out of business."

"But this is more so than—than usual."

"Not a bit, my dear fellow. I get lots of cases as bad as yours—and some worse."

"And *some* worse. That means that you don't get—"

But Furny was prepared for him here, too. "It means that every man's case is as serious as it can possibly be—to him and me. That's all we've got to consider. If I were to deal with your condition lightly, I shouldn't earn my fee. And if you were to take it lightly, it wouldn't be worth my while to treat you. There it is in a nutshell. I'm going at the matter very gravely indeed, and I hope you'll do the same." Smiling again, he rose. "Let me see—this is Wednesday—Saturday you'll want to be out of town. Suppose you come again on Monday. That will give me time to make—"

Charlie Grace, too, rose. "Just tell me this. Is it anything—anything that people get over?"

Furny smiled on, holding out his hand. "My dear fellow, that's not a scientific question. It isn't the way we classify conditions. Everything depends. Everything always depends. You do as I tell you, and come again on Monday. See you then. Good-by. Glad you looked in."

There were many questions still to ask, but the consultation having already lasted an hour, Charlie Grace felt himself obliged to go, especially as Furny conducted him to the door of the waiting-room and signaled to the next patient to come in.

He was out in the street before he reacted from

his anxieties—anxieties inspired by Furny's manner. Furny had taken the whole thing too solemnly. It was like him to do it. It was like any doctor. Doctors and lawyers had that in common, that when they got hold of a good thing they hung on to it—for their own purposes. No doubt Furny thought he had a gold-mine. It was extraordinary, too, the ease with which doctors would order a man to forsake all at a moment's notice and go to California or the south of France, as if he had no more to consider than a migrating bird. What he had expected of Furny was a pill, or a dose of something, that would steady his nerves and stop these attacks of vertigo. It was all he needed, too. He was convinced of that. There was nothing really wrong with him. He was as strong in wind and limb, and all the essentials of a good constitution, as he had ever been. As for this matter of diet, it was a wonder Furny didn't put him on a preparation of infant's food. It was all rot. Of course he would try the diet, for a week or so, at any rate, since it was only reasonable to attempt something—but he couldn't give up work and worry till the time came. He had always been accustomed to work and worry, and neither had ever done him any harm.

During a sleepless night, however, as well as the next day, he was not free from some of the misgivings that had beset him in Furny's office. Was it possible that he might be ill? Was it possible that he might become an invalid. Was it possible that he might be going—to die? He put the last suggestion from him as ridiculous. He was only thirty-eight. He was hale, hearty, and full of energy. He was eager with the zest of life. He had

fifty irons in the fire. He had his troubles, it was true—troubles in which it had seemed at times that it would be a luxury to put a bullet through his temple, and get out of them all. He remembered saying so to Emma—but it hadn't been serious. She herself had said that he would feel differently if he were *going* to die—and, though he *wasn't* going to die, he felt differently already. He was seedy and depressed, but it was a far cry from that to—death. Death! He couldn't think of such a thing. It was absurd. At thirty-eight he still had forty good years before him. How could he die, and leave the interests to which he was so vital? How could he die, when Hilda and the kids had need of him? How could he die, while Esther Legrand—? But, curiously enough, in the light of this new possibility, Esther Legrand became less obtrusive. Not that it was a possibility! He was careful to emphasize that fact. It was the sort of thing a man's imagination liked to play with, frightening himself in a childish way for the relief he got in finding it wasn't true.

On the Friday morning of that week a note arrived from Hilda.

DEAR CHARLIE,—I am going away for a few days, but you must not be worried about me, as I shall be with friends and quite safe. I may be gone ten days or a fortnight at most. Will you try to be as much as possible at the bungalow for the children's sake? They are quite well; but I shall be more at ease in my mind if I can think you are with them. Again I must ask you not to have a minute's anxiety on my account, and to believe me,

Your devoted

HILDA.

He would have dwelt more on this odd departure had his thoughts been less centered on himself. As it was, he went down that afternoon to Rosyth and remained till Monday. He was glad when Monday came, since he would go again to Furny's office and have these preposterous fears of his dispelled. It was curious how they dogged him, though he knew how unreasonable they were. They were with him as he tramped about the tiny estate, as he rowed the children on the Sound, as he directed Antonio in digging his first potatoes, and as he sat and smoked on the veranda, watching the passing ships. He said to himself that he knew now how the defendant in the dock must feel while waiting for the verdict of the jury.

And yet when the verdict was delivered he rallied all his forces to take it bravely. As a matter of fact he called the spoken sentence upon himself, for Furny did his best to spare him.

"It's just as I thought," he said, when giving on Monday the results of his tests and cogitations. "You've got to be very careful."

It was as much in bravado as in protest that Charlie Grace said, with a little air of bluster: "If being careful means shutting up shop and running away, it's out of the question. I shall not do anything of the kind."

Perhaps because he wasn't accustomed to have his patients speak to him in this way Furny reddened. Because he was slightly annoyed his voice grew high and thin. "Then it won't take six months to kill you. It's my duty to tell you that."

Charlie Grace sobered, nerving himself for the question to which he felt it imperative to have an

answer. "And how long will it take to kill me if I do as you say?"

But Furny was not wholly mollified. "I've got nothing to do with that. All I can tell you is the best possible thing to do in your present condition. If you won't do that—"

"Well, if I do?"

"Then it will be—the best possible thing."

"Shall I get better?"

Furny took a reasonable tone. "My dear boy, how can I tell that? A doctor can't predict the future any more than any other man. Everything depends. You might as well ask me if you take the best steamer for Europe whether or not you'll arrive. How do I know? You'll arrive—if nothing happens to prevent it."

"Then I'll put it this way. If I do as you say, do you see any reason why I *shouldn't* get better?"

Furny screwed up his mouth and considered what to answer. "N-no," he ventured, at last, with a decided nod of the head.

"And be as well as I was before?"

"I don't know how well you were before."

"Be perfectly well, then."

"My dear boy, don't talk nonsense. No one is perfectly well. You haven't been perfectly well for years, I should say—if you ever were. You've worked hard—and you've probably in some ways lived hard—"

"Oh, I've done both of those, all right."

"Well, then, what can you expect? You've come now to the verge of middle age, and you find you've —you've got to be careful. There's nothing extraordinary in that."

"I call it more than being careful, to chuck everything that's worth while in life—and shut oneself up in a glass case."

Furny shrugged his shoulders. "A glass case is better than a wooden one, isn't it?"

"So you do put it in that way?"

"Of course I put it in that way? What am I here for but to put it in that way—to every one who comes to me. It's the choice which it's my business to offer."

"But with me it's Hobson's choice, isn't it?—the choice of the wooden one."

"Why should you want to make me say that?"

"Because I'm one of those chaps who can stand a certainty but who are always tortured by suspense."

"But when I've no certainty to give you!"

Charlie Grace abandoned the formality of the patient for the privilege of the friend by getting up and moving about the room.

"You have a certainty to give me, old chap; only you don't feel it right to take away my last shred of hope. Come now! Isn't that it?"

Furny, too, relaxed from his more professional manner by swinging round in his revolving chair and crossing his stout legs. "Charlie, don't be a damn fool." His voice cracked on the words. "What you want me to tell you is that you're all right and that you've a long lease of life before you. I can't say the one any more than I can say the other. I can't say anything at all. I can only tell you what to do. When you've done it you must wait and see the results. That's all."

Charlie Grace strolled to one of the curtained windows, where he stood looking out at a stretch of

blank wall. Everything within him that made for wisdom urged him to take Furny's last words as conclusive, and let well enough alone. If he did so he would be no worse off than any other man for whom death may lurk in the next footfall—or may be postponed for fifty years. He couldn't have told what it was—whether curiosity or perversity or cowardice or pluck—that made this prudent reserve impossible. He felt that he must know. He was sure that if he knew he could orientate himself—in either direction. If he was to live, he might get life on some worthier basis because of this experience; if he had to die—well, other men had died before him, and he could screw his courage up to it as effectively as they. Besides, if he was going, he had all sorts of things to attend to, and attend to at once. With so many irons in the fire, as he put it, it would take two years at least for him to "pull out" and leave everything straight for Hilda and the kids. This thought was uppermost for the moment as he said, still with his back to Furny:

"If I do everything you tell me, do you think I can live two years?"

"Easily."

Furny shouted the words with a light laugh, evidently glad to be able to say something affirmative. But to Charlie Grace the reply contained a number of hints and limitations. It implied that he might easily live two years, but that he might not easily live ten, or even less than ten. Otherwise Furny would have said, "My dear boy, you're good for another twenty." He couldn't help a certain terror at the heart, and yet he decided to make a push for further information.

"Could I live another five?"

He was still staring blindly at the blank wall, but he could hear Furny swing brusquely in his revolving chair. "My dear boy, I'm not God. I can't tell you how long you're going to live. All I can say is that if you follow my directions and take this"—he leaned forward on the desk and began to scribble something—"why, then, you'll live as long as you're likely to."

Charlie Grace turned slowly. "Just answer this, will you? Did you ever know any one in whom these particular organs were as far gone as you say they are in my case—who did live for five?"

Furny continued to scribble. "It wouldn't be worth my while to answer that question, because it would have no bearing on your case whether I've known such an instance or not. Everything depends." As Charlie Grace came back toward the desk the doctor held up the paper he had folded and went on. "Now, Charlie, buck up, and don't be an ass. Take this to Melvin & Stewart, and follow the prescription. You'd better come back and see me by the end of next week. In the mean while go down to Rosyth and stay there. If they bother you from the office tell them to go to the devil."

The professional manner returned as he rose, smiled, and held out his hand.

"It's all very well for you—" Charlie Grace began, moodily, ignoring for the moment the proffered hand.

"And I hope it will be all very well for you, too," Furny broke in, quickly. "If you don't think it's likely to be, then, if I were you, I should go and see old Valenty, in West Fifty-fourth Street. I shouldn't wonder," he continued, as if with a new thought, "if

it wouldn't be the best thing for you to do, in any case. The fact is that you and I are too much by way of being old friends for you to take a great deal of stock in what I tell you. You'll obey orders from him when you wouldn't from me—"

"Oh, stow that, Furny." Charlie Grace said, curtly, and departed.

And yet he went next day to see old Valenty. He did so, not in distrust of Furny, but in corroboration. He did it craftily, too, saying nothing to old Valenty as to his consultations with Dr. Furnival, but beginning all over again. He had the greater satisfaction in doing so in that the old man—who was not so very old—listened to Charlie Grace's tale as to some absorbing experience he had never heard of before, interjecting a sympathetic "Indeed!" or "That's very characteristic" or "That's significant—most significant," at the emphatic points. It gave the patient a pleasing sense of aiding in scientific advance, of bringing to light new and unique phenomena.

But the results were curiously similar to those obtained with Furny. He, Charlie Grace, must be careful; he must eat and drink according to the strictest rule; he must give up work and worry; and he must pass the following winter, at least, in an equable climate—Florida, California, or the south of France.

"And if I did that should I get better?"

Old Valenty looked up at him from beneath shaggy gray brows. He spoke with a foreign accent, trilling the letter *r*. "With car-r-e—you might not get any worse."

"Should I live—say, another two years?"

"With car-r-e—yes."

"Should I live another five?"

"There's no telling what we may not accomplish—with car-r-e."

Charlie Grace took this as enough. He had got all he could expect from old Valenty. The superior court had confirmed the sentence imposed by the lower. There was nothing to do but take himself off and wait for execution.

He hurried along Fifty-fourth Street in the direction of Fifth Avenue, as though by sheer rapidity of movement he could run away from his doom. But, having reached the corner, he knew neither which way to turn nor what to do. There was no more object in going to the right hand than there was in going to the left. Action of any kind had suddenly become futile. It was as if he had already been detached from the movement and existence around him. He looked up and down the street—the street that compressed into itself most of the things he had cared and worked for—as a bird might glance back at the nest and the shell out of which it has taken flight. As far as he was concerned it had served its purpose; its work was done.

It was the end of June. The passers-by were listless; the vehicles relatively few. The neighboring houses, with blinds drawn, themselves suggested death. It was still two or three hours to evening, and he must fill in the time somehow. But how? But where? But why? Desires and motives had failed him alike. Why do one thing rather than another? Why do anything at all? The resources of the metropolis, great even in summer, had all at once grown as meaningless to him as if he were a

departed soul come back. He had neither part nor lot in them. It was as if he had already bidden them good-by.

It was a strange sensation, in this city, in this street, where he had never before been at a loss for interesting occupation, where the difficulty had always been to do the many pleasant things that might be done. They were still there—the pleasant things, but their significance had departed. They had departed and left him, as it were, high and dry. Words long forgotten and culled from he knew not where came back to him, though with only a partial application to his state of mind: "When I was a child I spake as a child, I thought as a child, I understood as a child: but when I became a man I put away childish things." Dimly he felt that he *had* put away childish things, but that he had not yet become a man. Illusion had gone before reality had come to take its place. Or was it that reality had gone, and there was nothing before him but illusion—nothing before him at all?

He stood so long on the street corner that the mere necessity for moving on became imperative. Across the street a church shot its sharp white spires into the blue air. He had entered it at times—years ago, when he was in the habit of showing the sights of the city to country relatives from Horsehair Hill. He knew it would be cool and dim and empty in there, and that he could sit in one of the quiet pews and let the iron enter into his soul. He was half-way across the street when the thought came to him: "Not there! Not in a church!" To take refuge in a church at this minute of all minutes would be like striking his colors; like a kind of

capitulation; like accepting a favor from a hand he had dashed away. If he must die he would die without the Church, as he had lived without it. He owed it to his self-respect as a man to do that.

He passed the church, and went down the street toward his club. That, too, at this time of year, would be cool and dim and empty. Moreover, it would be neutral. It would connect him with no early associations, and force on him no suggestions, and have no spires pointing in a direction in which he didn't want to look. It proved to be cool and dim, but not quite empty.

"Hello, Grace! What 'll you have? Let me make you acquainted with Mr. Saunders."

It was the voice of an old friend named Williams. Williams and Saunders were seated in deep, luxurious chairs in the smoking-room, cooling drinks on a small round table between them. Charlie Grace paused a minute to exchange conventional greetings; but he wouldn't share the cooling drinks, or even sit down. How could he? It was all very well for Williams and Saunders, since they were not going to die. But he was; and the fact stood between him and all the small interests of life. They were not interests any longer. It seemed curious to him already that people should fritter away time on them. No one could—except men like Williams and Saunders, who weren't going to die. If they ever were to die, it would not be till long indefinite periods had rolled by; whereas, he could only live his two meager years—"with car-r-e." Two years! It would pass in a twinkling. He looked back to what he had been doing two years earlier, and it was like the other day. It would be only like to-

morrow, or the day after to-morrow at furthest, before he should be carried out from the house in Seventy-fifth Street, or from the bungalow on Long Island, in a long wooden box, and be hustled into the ground.

Standing by the little round table with the drinks on it, he listened absently to Williams's account of the trip he was about to take with Saunders into the woods of New Brunswick, and declined an invitation to take part in the expedition. He gave as his excuse the fact that he was going to build a new house on his little Long Island property. It was the excuse he would have given in any case, because it was what he expected to be occupied with during the greater part of the summer. Ralph Coningsby had mysteriously disappeared, but when he came back, he, Charlie Grace, had meant to fix definitely on the site and begin making the architectural plans. It came over him now, however, that the new house would never be built; or, if so, that he should never see it; and so with a curt good-by he turned abruptly away.

He saw he couldn't remain at the club. Clubs were not for him any more. He would go home.

But once out in the street the thought of the empty house appalled him. What could he do there? The old woman who, with her husband, took care of it in summer would give him something to eat; but how should he pass the evening? He was not a reader. He didn't look into twenty books in a year. He had something like a scorn of books, considering them as shadows in a world of living deeds and men. Ordinarily he had some power of "pottering" about a house of his own, with a

practical eye for windows and doors and furnaces and paint and other details that need "seeing to." But he couldn't potter now. Pottering implied continuity — continuity of purpose — continuity of life—and he had come to the point where everything broke off.

In the end he called a passing cab and drove to the Waldorf. It was his favorite hotel. New hotels had sprung up in New York, eclipsing, perhaps, a glory that had been brightest in the middle nineties; but Charlie Grace had never lost the glamour attaching to those early years when the mere process of "staying at the Waldorf" was a proof of elevation to the higher social ranks. It was at all times one of the lounging-places he preferred. He liked its immense spaces, its shadowy perspectives, its peopled corridors, its color, its promiscuity, its leisured movement, its oddly variegated life. He liked the way in which the stranger could come and go at his ease, making himself at home with as much freedom as if he had paid for everything beneath the great hospitable roof. He liked the assemblage of unclassified human units, come together from all the corners of the country, from all the ends of the earth, to jostle, and stare, and pass mysteriously onward. He was always at home among human odds and ends—more so than in the elegant spheres to which he had at times desired admission. In seeking their contact to-day he was moved by much the same impulse as that of a wounded beast in taking refuge amid the friendly herd.

It was natural enough that on a midsummer afternoon the current of life in the halls of the

Waldorf should run langourously. And yet it ran. Queer, burly, clean-shaven men, who might have been detectives or card-sharpers, as it happened, hung about the offices and news-stands, each with a cigar; ladies wearing summer toilettes and diamonds took tea in palm-rooms or sat fanning themselves in corners cushioned and draped *à la Turque*. Every one had the air of waiting for the unexpected to happen—of waiting patiently, because any minute might bring some romantic event to pass. Charlie Grace knew the feeling well. But nothing could happen to him now. He was going to die. He was already as good as dead. All of these people, so idly and yet so busily occupied, were going to live. Not one of them knew but what he had forty or fifty or sixty good years before him. It was easy for them to smoke cigars and sip tea with such a prospect as that. In moving down the long corridors and through the wide lounging-rooms he felt like a specter. It seemed to him that he must startle people as he passed.

A stroll through the halls sufficed to show him that the place knew him no more. "What have I to do here?" he asked himself, and went out again into the heat.

"Oh, Hilda!"

It was the first expression of his need, of his loneliness. He had whispered the words half aloud as he stood on the hotel steps. Now that he came to think of it, he believed that no one on earth had ever been more lonely than he was at that moment. One world seemed to have cast him out, while no other world—if there was any other world—was willing to take him in. For the first time in all the years since

he had been married he longed for his wife. He had often, in absences from her, wished she was near; but he had been able to get along with tolerable ease without her. Now he had need of her—desperate need of her. It was a need that, when he thought it over a few hours later, surprised him. Had he been asked to name the presence that would most fully meet his yearnings at the moment, he would have said, without hesitation, Esther Legrand. But he had not been asked. He had not even interrogated himself. The half-smothered cry had welled up within him before he knew it was coming—before he could take or give account of it. It came of its own accord—probably because Hilda was his wife. Whatever differences there might have been between them, she was bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh, and shared his existence. She was the one being in the world toward whom no sentence of death could change his relation. Between Esther Legrand and himself there was a gulf fixed; between Hilda and him there were the strongest of common bonds. He went back into the hotel and telegraphed to her.

Am not very well. Going to stay definitely at Rosyth for a few weeks. Shall be glad if you will come home as soon as you conveniently can.

CHARLIE.

He addressed the telegram to the care of Mrs. Douglas Meredith, Greenacre Farm, Roland, New Jersey. He knew that Hilda had gone into retreat with her Meredith friends as certainly as if she had made no mystery about it. She had made a mystery because she knew he didn't like them.

Leaving the hotel again, he took a cab and drove

to the ferry which would take him across the East River to the little station where he should find a train for Rosyth. As he drove through the dingy streets, fetid with summer refuse, amid which children of all nationalities played, he said to himself, "This is my real funeral." It was his good-by. He was turning his back on the old life for good. He was turning his back on all life for good. During his remaining two years he would cross the river again, of course. He would have to withdraw as gradually as he could from the offices of the Trans-Canadian, and he should be obliged to wind up his personal affairs. There would probably be some months during which he should be able to move about much as usual. But he would never come back as the old Charlie Grace. The old Charlie Grace was taking his last drive. It would be a new man who would reappear in Broadway.

CHAPTER VI

IN the morning Charlie Grace was astonished to find how soundly he had slept. He had not had so refreshing a night for months. His immediate thought on waking was of his interviews with Furny and old Valenty. They came to him as nightmares. For a few minutes before actually getting up he had the relief of taking them as hideous dreams. Nothing so preposterous could have happened as a fact.

Realization came in proportion as the interests of the day began. It was astonishing how many things brought the great change home to him—brought home to him the fact that his stay had become temporary. The children played about him; Antonio shambled up asking for orders; a man appeared from the village of Rosyth to show Mr. Grace a horse the latter had thought of buying; a carpenter brought plans for building a new and larger garage. Everything suggested permanence—and he was going away.

Later in the day a telegram arrived from Mrs. Meredith.

Hilda not here. Have not heard from her for some weeks. Can I do anything to help you?

EMILY MEREDITH.

He was disappointed, but not alarmed. Hilda would not have bidden him be without anxiety on

her account unless she were going to some place of safety. Moreover, hope developed as the day wore on. He felt so relatively well that it was impossible to believe that Furny and old Valenty hadn't been mistaken. Doctors were often mistaken. Every one knew of instances in which men had been given by the doctors only a few weeks or a few months to live, and they had lived for years. With thoughts like these he got through the day easily enough.

Less easily he got through the evening. He begged Miss Tritton to let Billy sit up for dinner, but by half past eight the boy had to go to bed. Charlie Grace read the New York afternoon papers from the first page to the last. He even turned the leaves of a current novel; but he had so long neglected or despised the imaginative faculty that now it wouldn't work. When everything failed him he could only sit on the veranda, smoking idly, looking into the velvety darkness overhanging the Sound, and fixing his eyes on the scattered lights. He longed for, and yet dreaded, the moment for turning in. He had turned in so many, many times in his life—and now the times were numbered. Each night would dock one more. He could never lie down without thinking of it, without mentally scoring it off. Presently he should get up less frequently—there would be days, weeks, when he shouldn't get up at all. Later he would crawl about, only to take to bed again. He should be weakened, dispirited, wrecked. Of what had been Charlie Grace nothing would remain but the ruins. Perhaps he should have convulsions, like his father. He recalled how it had required two and three men to hold the poor old rector of St. David's—mercifully grown uncon-

scious—into his bed. If that were to happen to him he, too, would be unconscious, never to know anything any more.

There would be that mitigation, at least. He should already, to all intents and purposes, have passed into oblivion, into nothingness. Fortunately, he didn't believe in a continuance of life. He congratulated himself on that. It cut the thing off short, so that if one had no hope one had no fears. One had only a horror—the horror of annihilation; but, after all, there were worse horrors than that. He should pass into nothing more awful than an endless, dreamless sleep, forgetting and being forgotten.

Yes, he would be forgotten. There would be no one deeply concerned to keep his memory vivid. Hilda would in all probability marry again. The idea gave him a pang, but he tried to take it reasonably. He had not made her so happy that she wouldn't be glad of consolation. He resolved so to arrange his will that remarriage to some one whom she might love would be as easy for her as possible. And then there were the children. To Billy he would be a dim, shadowy personage, dimmer and more shadowy by far than his mother was to himself, and she was dim and shadowy enough. To Milly he would be nothing at all. By the time she was a woman she would find it difficult to recall the fact that she had ever climbed on his knee. The paternal instinct was not strong in him; and yet he owned to another pang. It required some effort to remind himself that it could make no difference to him. By the time Milly was a woman he would be nothing but a body drying and shriveling in a

grave. Milly might remember or forget—any one might remember or forget—but it would be all one to him. He would have attained to the blessedness, the real, even if negative, blessedness of dead indifference.

But in the middle of the night he woke in alarm. He woke reasoning, arguing, with half-formed speeches on his lips. It was as if he had been subconsciously debating with an opponent who, while he, Charlie Grace, returned to the world, persisted in remaining under the threshold and in the dark. What if there *was* a continuance of life? What if the teachings heard in childhood were to prove true? What if there was a world of consequences, retributions, and rewards? What if, after all, there was a God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, to whom an account must be given?

"You can't do away with them," the invisible opponent argued, "by the simple process of not believing in them. Your disbelief can make no difference to them. It can only make a difference to you."

He felt helpless, terrified. It was horror enough to be hurried on to his doom, as he was being hurried; but who could tell what was to follow after it? It was all very well to say he should pass into a merciful oblivion; but how did he know? For nearly twenty years he had allowed himself to do more or less as he pleased, on the ground that for sane men and women of the world there was no such bugbear as Sin; but how did he know? "Yes; how do you know? How do you know?" taunted the opponent who lurked *sub limina*. "You've found it convenient to blast all the theories of a future

life with the dynamite of your own: 'I don't believe it'; but how do you know there won't be a world in which that explosive will have no effect?"

"How do I know there will be?" was the obvious retort.

"That's not to the point. If there isn't, so much the better for you. But if there is—where shall you be then?"

He got up and turned on the lights. The sight of the comfortable room reassured him. It was incredible that he should be called away against his will from a spot in which he was so much at home. It was incredible that he, whose natural habitat was in offices and clubs and restaurants, should be summoned to vague, mysterious regions of spiritual light or darkness. It couldn't be. An evening paper, at which he had been looking after he had got into bed, lay on the floor. He picked it up and studied its commonplace columns eagerly. He studied them because they *were* commonplace—because they kept him close to the possible, to the real. On his dressing-table were the circulars of the various manufacturers of automobiles with whom he had had to do in his selection of a new touring-car. He studied this literature, too—not because he wasn't already familiar with its contents, but to steady his nerves by taking his mind from subjects to which it was hostile. At the end of an hour he was able to creep into bed again, put out the light, and fall into a restless sleep.

Two days later he went up to town and spent the morning at the office. Here his chief occupation was in writing to Sir William Short, asking to be relieved of his duties as soon as possible, since he

should be obliged to treat himself as an invalid for the next two years. When the lunch-hour came he avoided the society of his cronies, going off alone to an obscure eating-house that he had never entered before. In the afternoon he went to Vandiver Place to keep an appointment with Rufus Legrand, for which he had arranged by telephone.

The main object of his errand was soon stated. He was eager to carry out his projects for a William Grace Memorial without any reserves and with no delay.

"I've got over the silly feelings I had when we talked about it last," he said.

"That's good," Legrand commended, fitting the tips of his fingers together, as he sat in his high-backed arm-chair in the study corner.

"I want to do it, and I want to do it at once. I shall probably have to go away for next winter—and I should like to know that the whole thing was in hand before then."

When they had discussed exhaustively the practical points connected with the memorial, Charlie Grace said, abruptly:

"Where do you suppose father is now?"

It was probably because there was some aggressiveness, and perhaps some scorn, in the question that Legrand contented himself with a half-smiling shake of the head as he said, "I've no idea."

Charlie Grace looked astonished. "Oh, but I thought that's just what you had."

The shake of the head was repeated. The smile was repeated, too. "Not at all."

"But I thought you had the whole thing mapped out—heaven and hell, and all the rest of it."

"Not to my knowledge."

Charlie Grace's face was blank. He was so surprised that he broke into his next question without thinking of its form. "Well, what *do* you know?"

"On the point you raise I don't know anything at all."

"But I've always understood that it was the subject on which clergymen were most eloquent—and most sure."

"Is it? You may be right. Your experience is probably greater than mine."

"Well, *isn't* it?"

"I can only say that I've never heard any clergyman eloquent on the subject—or sure, either. But, then, I don't hear many clergymen—except myself."

Charlie Grace drummed with his fingers on the top of the desk beside which he sat. "But you—you clergymen—think that when people die they may pass into a state of happiness—"

"Quite true."

"But how do you *know?*"

"We don't know. We only infer it—as you infer something as to the interior of a house when you see the door. If the door is mean and squalid you look for squalor and meanness within. If the door is noble and beautiful, why, then, you take for granted that it will lead to something worthy of itself. You can't say exactly what it will be till you go in; but even while you stand without you can be justified in having—expectations. I don't think that you'll find that the Church—or the clergymen who've apparently struck you as too cock-sure—will often go beyond that point—the point of—expectations."

Charlie Grace pondered this, trying to fathom its

meaning. "I don't see what you mean by the door," he said, at last.

Legrand's eyes rested on him a moment, mildly yet searchingly. "And do you want me to tell you?"

"If you don't mind."

"I don't mind, if you would really like to know. I shouldn't care to go into the subject at all if you're asking out of mere intellectual curiosity or for the sake of argument. I never argue about these things. Spiritual things are spiritually discerned, or they're not discerned at all."

The younger man didn't greatly relish this speech. While he had reasons of his own for desiring any hints Legrand could give him, he objected to taking the position which the clergyman might define as that of "a seeker after truth." He preferred the excuse of intellectual curiosity, or even the imputation of polemics. Nevertheless, his interest in the subject was so keen that he felt himself obliged to say, "I should really *like* to know—for personal reasons."

"Very well, Charlie; I'll tell you." He paused for a minute, while a kind of illumination came into his long, ascetic face. "It 'll sound strange to you, I dare say, because you're not used now to this sort of phraseology. Jesus Christ said, *I* am the Door."

Charlie Grace moved abruptly. "Oh!" The smothered exclamation indicated discomfort rather than surprise, though there was an infusion of surprise in the tone. If he could have described his sensation he would have said it was like that which runs through some family circle where a name which all have agreed never to mention is suddenly pro-

nounced by some blundering stranger. It was a name that brought back recollections of his early years that were not the less disagreeable for having grown by this time somewhat confused. He said "Oh!" again, because of being at a loss.

Legrand went on. "You can understand, then, that with this radiant Being as the Door we don't think we can pitch our hopes too high as to what we shall see when we enter."

Charlie Grace reflected. "So that you don't pretend to see farther than—the Door?"

"Not yet. But for the moment we consider that far enough. I can't tell you where your father is—which is what you asked me. But I know that, having passed through that portal, he must be in some state of blessedness. Does that answer your question?"

Charlie Grace nodded silently with a ruminating air, and presently took his leave.

For the next few days he was mentally calmer, but physically more depressed. He was so much alone that his thoughts were thrown in on himself. Thrown in on himself, they worked back to Esther Legrand. During the first hours of shock her image had receded. Now that he was growing accustomed to the new conditions, she seemed to emerge again out of the mist that had suddenly settled down over his immediate past. It was an indication that past and present were once more falling into perspective, that life as a whole was beginning to assert itself as against a single stupendous fact. In his life as a whole Esther Legrand had so long been the beautifying, glorifying factor that in his hours of solitude she resumed that function. It was Hilda now who began to recede.

She receded as the earthly recedes before the heavenly, as the human before the angelic. His experiences with the two women justified him, to some extent, in feeling this. With Hilda life was nervous, tense, dramatic with the unexpected. He had formed the habit, when she asked to talk with him privately or began to speak in a certain tone, of saying to himself, "What's coming now?" With Esther, on the other hand, intercourse was always refreshing, consoling. There was nothing strained about her; she demanded nothing strained from him. She was so spontaneous that he became spontaneous himself. She was so good that when with her even he felt the impulse to amend. In this respect she inspired him from within, while Hilda dragged him from without. It made the difference.

It made such a difference that he had the conviction once more that if he could only see this girl he would get better. He would get better even if he didn't get well. And who could tell? Perhaps he *might* get well. He was not yet so convinced of his malady as to be wholly without the hope of shaking it off. If he were ever to shake it off it would surely be in the strength of this lovely presence, breathing new life into him, like the cheering spirit of health.

He was thinking so on the following Sunday morning as he sat on the veranda, trying to take an interest in the Sunday papers just come down from New York. On seeing Miss Tritton and the children start for church he had to restrain himself from offering to go with them. He would have liked going. He would have liked it as a matter of curiosity. It might have given him an opportunity to put Rufus Legrand's assertions to the test. While

he hesitated to contradict a man so experienced and so sincere, he could have sworn to hearing sermons in which the joys of heaven were described with as much detail as if the preacher had been in paradise and come back. To have found a specific instance to support this contention would have been a satisfaction; but not even for that would he enter a church. To do so would seem like a sign of weakness—to himself. Were he in any other physical condition, he might have hesitated less. As it was, his very sense of need rendered him the more determined to do nothing that would look like giving in. So he stayed at home and read the papers. He read listlessly, often letting the sheet he held fall to the floor, while his eyes followed vaguely the course of some passing ship or the movements of a group of young men bathing beneath a neighboring headland. It was a still morning of intense sunshine. Except for an occasional distant shout from one of the young men below, no sound broke in on the shrilling of insect life that intensified the silence.

The bray of a motor-horn was, therefore, the more strident. Charlie Grace earnestly hoped that no unwelcome guest from New York was going to intrude on his solitude. The solitude was bad enough; but to have to play the host to people whom he didn't want would be worse. He sat still while the motor drove up to the door, and a murmur of voices made itself heard. It was possible that whoever it was would go away again. So as to seem the less aware that any one had come he didn't so much as look round toward the living-room.

"Charlie!"

It was Hilda's voice. He turned to see her stand-

ing in the open French window. She wore a long fawn-colored dust-cloak and a cloud of floating veils. He rose and kissed her.

"I'm glad you've come back. It was dull without you," was all that for the moment he could find to say.

Perhaps because he had been thinking so much during the morning of Esther Legrand, Hilda's appearance moved him less than he had expected. She seemed to feel this, and, moving out to the veranda, sat down at some little distance from the chair he had retaken. She looked at him anxiously.

"Charlie, how are you?"

"I'm—I'm—pretty well."

"Are you any better?"

"I don't know that I can say that; but I don't feel any worse. Where have you been? Or would you rather not tell me?"

"Yes; I'll tell you—in a minute. I'll tell you because—because I've brought some one back with me."

"Indeed? Who?"

She leaned forward, her gloved hands clasped in her lap. "Oh, Charlie, you mustn't think me interfering—but I want you to be happy—I want you to get well. I know you can't do it with me; and so—"

"For God's sake, Hilda, what have you done?"

"I haven't done anything much yet, Charlie; but I'm going to do whatever you would like. Nothing matters to me, so long as you get well—and are happy. Since I can't help you in that—and there's some one who can—I've been to see Fanny—and—" She sprang to the door of the living-room and called: "Esther! Come here!"

He, too, was on his feet, whispering hoarsely. "Wait, Hilda, wait. For God's sake, wait."

But he could already see Esther Legrand advancing through the shadows of the living-room in response to Hilda's call. She also wore a fawn-colored dust-cloak. A long jade-green veil floated back over her shoulders with the rapidity of her motion. She passed through the French window and out to the veranda with the swift, unhesitating grace that had always been to him one of the charms of her personality. Both her hands were extended toward him, palms downward, in a gesture of surrender. Hilda stood aside, as a spectator, leaning lightly on the back of a wicker chair.

"It's so good of you to want me to come. Fanny tried to keep me, but when Mrs. Grace told me how ill you were, of course I couldn't stay there."

It seemed to him that he recovered from a few seconds of being stunned to find her sitting beside him, while Hilda had disappeared. He hardly knew what he was saying; he could hardly follow her words. He could neither estimate the present nor forecast the future. Through the whirling and surging of his brain one wild thought, both marvelous and grotesque, seemed clear; that Hilda had given him up and Esther Legrand had come to claim him. What did it mean but that she had come to claim him, when she sat there, simple, radiant, calm, as in the place that belonged to her and to no other?

"It was such a surprise when Mrs. Grace appeared! We didn't know anything about it till she telephoned from Charlottetown. That's the capital of the island—where you land. Fanny's place is not far

away—at Keppoch—on a beautiful bay, with the greenest, greenest fields running down to a line of vivid scarlet cliffs. I loved it there; but of course I couldn't stay when I knew you wanted me."

He still followed her words but vaguely. He was looking at her deep violet eyes, with their curiously changing shades, at the little flushes of carmine that came and went quickly in the white rose of the cheek, at the dim bronze-gold of the coils of hair gleaming through the green veil. He was thinking of her extraordinary manner, so spontaneous—in its way, so matter-of-fact. He wondered what Hilda could possibly have told her, how much of his secret she had betrayed.

"How did you *know* I wanted you?" he heard himself asking, as if it was some one else who had spoken.

"Mrs. Grace told me. Besides, I should have known it in any case as soon as I'd heard you were ill. Or, rather"—she flashed on him one of her fine smiles—"or, rather, I should have known that I wanted *you*. It's that that we feel when people we care for are ill or in trouble, don't you think? It isn't how much they want to see us, but how much we want to see *them*."

He answered stupidly. "Is it? I don't know."

"Well, perhaps a man wouldn't know. It's different with a woman, because it's her—her instinct, I suppose—to do things for people."

"What sort of things?"

"Why, any sort of things. How do I know? Whatever needs to be done."

"I mean, what sort of things would you do—for me?"

She laughed. "What a funny question! You'd have to be a man to ask a thing like that. When you go to see some one you like—for the reason I've come here—you don't make a program beforehand. You simply come. You're on the spot. If there's nothing to be done—why, then, so much the better! You just—see."

"And did you give up your holiday and come all the way back just to—see?"

She laughed again. "I wish you wouldn't catechize me like that. If I didn't know to the contrary I should be tempted to think you wanted me to go away. I came—since you insist on my saying it—because you're the best man in the world, except father—and you're ill—and—and"—the carmine flush ran in little rapid veins like vivid lightning from the cheek to the chin, to the ear, to the temples—"and—and—I like you. Could any one have a better motive than that?"

"No; I suppose not. And did Hilda tell you anything more than that I—I wanted you?"

"She said you wouldn't get better unless I came."

"And did you believe it?"

Her head went slightly to one side. "Well—n-no. Frankly, I didn't. But people have those fancies when they're ill—or when some one who's dear to them is ill. You've got to humor them. You *love* to humor them; don't you think you do? I've had people feel like that about me before—I suppose every one has—not people in your *class*, of course—but, on the other hand, not any one who was so—so near to me as you are."

"And is it to humor me—or to humor Hilda—that you've come this time?"

She leaned forward with a sudden impulse, grasping the arm of his chair. "Dear Mr. Grace, you ought to have been a lawyer. Isn't this what they call cross-questioning? Am I the plaintiff or the defendant, or what? I must say you don't seem to me very ill."

"And if I'm not very ill, shall you be sorry to have come back?"

She was still grasping the arm of his chair, but she raised herself to an upright position. Her manner changed slowly. She turned away her face till he could see nothing but the profile, in which the carmine became fixed. Her eyes were alternately downcast and lifted for hurried glances at the sea. He could barely catch the monosyllable as she breathed the word:

"No."

The instant was upon him that he dreaded more than that of his approaching death. It was also the instant that might give him, as in some Oriental legend, one brief glimpse into paradise before he turned away to hell. It was also the instant that could change, with the chemistry of half a dozen words, all the relative positions and conditions in the little world of which he was in some sort the center—resolving neutral calm into fleeting, futile joys and bitter, life-long tragedies. He could hold his peace, and leave things dully placid as they were; or with a question or two he could set the spirit free to scale heights and descend into abysses, and, like Adam in Eden, be as a god, knowing good—and evil.

Fortunately, there was time. Her confession would wait. Since she was ready to make it, he could debate with himself whether it were wise to

seize the moment of fatal rapture—or let it pass. It was obvious that, in view of what was coming on him, it could do no one any good to seize it, and yet to let it pass would be like dashing aside the one golden cup life had ever set to his lips. It seemed like an eternity that they sat thus—he motionless, a copy of the Sunday *Leader* across his knees; she also motionless, erect, with face averted. He had come to no conclusion when he found himself saying, as though against his will:

"Could you tell me why—if I'm not very ill—you won't be sorry to have come?"

Her answer came quite readily: "I could only tell you if you asked me."

The responsibility being again thrown on him, he took a few more minutes for meditation. "Well, I do ask you," he ventured then.

It seemed to him that a glimmer of a smile ran along her lips. "You must ask me more plainly than that."

So the weight of the whole situation was to be on his shoulders. But he had gone so far—above all, he had let her go so far—that it was no longer possible to hold back. Even so, he could only approach the subject warily and from a distance. It added force to his temptation that Hilda had, in a measure, given him her permission—that she might be said to have forced him into a position where he could do nothing but go on. Long minutes went by before he said, cautiously, and yet with pulses pounding:

"Has it anything to do with—love?"

She answered promptly, though faintly, "Yes."

"Is it love that I know anything about?"

Again her response came with surprising swiftness. "Very likely." Then a second later: "I should think you—must."

The response came with surprising swiftness, but the head was lowered, and the carmine became crimson.

Suddenly he dashed the paper from his knees and sprang to his feet. "I—I can't ask you any more."

Revulsion had come upon him—revulsion from this effort to drag a secret that, after all, was a guilty secret, from the soul of a girl almost too pure and too innocent to be on earth. He might have sunk low, he said to himself, but he had not sunk so low as that. He felt himself saved. He was grasping the rail of the veranda, with stern eyes fixed seaward, when he heard her say, reproachfully:

"Oh, but I want you to ask me. Ralph said that if you *did* ask me I could tell you; but that I wasn't to tell you unless—"

He turned to find her sitting as she had sat before, grasping the arm of the chair from which he had risen. The only change was in her face, which was now lifted to his in almost childish disappointment.

Again he felt that he was saved, but that he was saved—otherwise. He was saved, not by any heroic, godlike self-control, but by a humiliation more laughable than had ever entered into the fate of man. He came very near to laughing at it himself. He felt as if nothing could have done him so much good as a hearty hysteric laugh. He could have laughed loud and long and lustily, laughed, as the saying went, till he brought the house down, as Samson brought down the temple of the Philistines. Not much had been spared him of late years; but

he could see now that other things had come by way of the common lot. This was something special, something over and above the common lot, something that could have been invented only for Charlie Grace. The trick was on so gigantic a scale that he could rise to it. He didn't know who was in the secret of it, whether Esther was, or Hilda was, or any of the sportive Olympian gods. Very likely no one was in the secret but himself. Very likely it was he, the skilful master-builder of his own career, after so long patting himself on the back, with plaudits for his ability to achieve success alone, who had created this situation for his sole benefit. In any case, the joke was so stupendous that he was able to respond to it in the jocular vein. He spoke jovially.

"So you're engaged—at last!"

She blushed more deeply, and nodded. "Yes; at last. I knew you'd be glad."

"Of course I'm glad. Let me see! How long is it that you've been—in love with him?"

"It's really about five years now—only I didn't suppose any one could have suspected it as early as that."

He felt free to laugh at last, but he did that jovially, too. "Oh, but I've a pretty keen eye—for things of that sort."

"You must have. But you won't say anything about it yet, will you? We haven't even told father and mother. In fact, we're rather afraid to. Not that father won't be pleased. He will be. But poor mother will feel badly."

"Why should she—when you're marrying the man—the man"—he forced himself to say it,

though he had to make a convulsive movement of the throat to get the words out—"the man you've given your heart to?"

"Oh, well, for a lot of reasons. Poor mother hasn't always had an easy time—and she's wanted me so much to marry some one with money."

"And why didn't you?"

She lifted on him shy eyes in which there was a gleam of laughter. "Well, no one with money ever asked me, for one thing. And if he had asked me, how *could* I, when all these years I've—I've been in love with Ralph?"

He left the rail against which he had been leaning, and crossed the veranda to the living-room door. "Hilda!" he called. "Hilda!"

There was no reply. He went into the room, and to the foot of the stairs. "Hilda! Come down! There's great news to tell you—if you haven't heard it already."

There was a faint response from Hilda's room, whereupon he returned to his place beside the rail of the veranda.

Esther was still sitting where he had left her. "No; Mrs. Grace doesn't know it," she explained. "I didn't feel at liberty to tell her. Ralph doesn't want me to tell any one till he's spoken to father and mother. He only made an exception of you. You've been so dear and kind to us both—and we've felt that you did know, anyhow—so that Ralph said that if you were to ask me—"

"When *did* Ralph say all this?"

"Only the other day—just before Mrs. Grace arrived at Fanny's. Ralph came to Charlottetown, and I went over to see him. I couldn't tell Fanny,

because she'd given her promise to mother not to invite Ralph to Keppoch while I was there. When he wrote that he was coming to Charlottetown I knew what it was for—and I couldn't let him take the long journey for nothing, could I? So I went over and spent the morning with him in a beautiful park overlooking a bay—not the same bay I spoke of before—or else another part of that bay—"

"And so you became engaged?"

"But nobody knows anything about it but you—and now Mrs. Grace will know. But you both *must* have known how we felt—Ralph and I—"

"Oh, of course! Of course!"

"And that's why I sha'n't be sorry to have come back even if you *don't* need me. Ralph is in New York."

Hilda appeared in the frame of the French window. She had taken off her dust-cloak and her veil, and was in white. Now that he could see her face he noticed its pallor. He noticed the wan deadness of her eyes. They had grown big and hollow and mournful and lusterless, as her mother's used to be. He began to get some idea of the journey she had taken in order to make him happy and save his life.

For the moment, however, the jocular spirit possessed him up to the danger-point. The slightest departure from it would be perilous. He waved his hand airily toward Esther as he spoke.

"What do you think, Hilda? That shameless young woman there has been and gone and got herself engaged!"

Esther turned slowly in her chair toward Hilda, lifting on her the same shy eyes with their glimmer of amusement. For support Hilda held to the sides of

the French window. Her pallor became waxlike; her eyes immense. The resemblance to her mother was more striking than ever. She glanced from Esther to Charlie Grace and from Charlie Grace back to Esther. It was not relief she showed so much as fear. Her lips moved, but she seemed powerless to say a word.

It was Charlie Grace who broke the spell. "Go and kiss her. Kiss her for us both. Kiss her—for me. And tell her how much we hope she's going to be happy."

With these words he went down the steps leading to the greensward, and from thence to the long, rickety flight of stairs descending to the shore. But he took care not to be out of sight before Hilda could follow him with her gaze and see that he was nonchalantly lighting a cigar.

CHAPTER VII

"IT was that poor woman, Hattie Bright. How could I refuse to do what she was capable of doing?"

"But I don't see the resemblance between the two things."

"If you could look into my heart—or follow the workings of my mind—you would, Charlie."

"Her motive was to—"

"To save the man she cared for. So was mine. It was another kind of saving, it's true, but it was the same process. What she couldn't do for him she had to surrender to another."

"A good deal depends on what you mean by saving."

"What I mean by it now is your getting well, Charlie—your being happy again. I don't care for anything—anything in the world—so much as that. Surely you'll let me feel that much! You *must* let me feel it, whether you will or no—because I see now how much harm I've done you."

"Do you? It's more than I do."

"Very likely, Charlie. You're so kind. But it's very plain to me that another kind of woman would have made you another kind of man."

"What other kind of woman?"

"A nobler kind; a broader, and less suspicious, and more generous kind; a woman like Esther Legrand."

"And so you made up your mind to"—he debated with himself whether to use the word or not, deciding to utter it—"you made up your mind to—to *sacrifice* her to me—to throw the princess to the ogre."

"You couldn't sacrifice *her*, Charlie—not any more than you could sacrifice music or light or air. It wouldn't be within our power. There are things so lofty that we've no control over them. They only get control over us. It never occurred to me that if she came here any harm could come of it. I knew there could be nothing but good."

"What kind of good? What did you think *could* come of it—exactly?"

"I didn't know—exactly. I didn't think—exactly. I didn't think anything, or know anything, but that you were ill and unhappy—and that I couldn't help you, while she could. You don't suppose it was easy for me to come to that conclusion, do you? I wouldn't have come to it at all if it hadn't been forced on me. I'll tell you something, Charlie, that will show you what I mean. During the past five or six years I've tried to hate her—and I never could. She was so simple and serene and so far above me that it was like trying to hate the sky. One only hates oneself for not loving it."

"And did you think *I* loved—the sky?"

"I think you saw it was the sky."

He hung his head in the darkness. He thought he had run the gamut of all the kinds of shame, but this was striking a new note of it. He *had* seen it was the sky, and, misled by an ambitious old woman and a sweet, tender-hearted old maid, had tried to drag it down to him. He had seen it was the sky, and was dissatisfied because it was not the mire. It

seemed to him that he had never been aware of the real degeneration of his soul till then.

He was so long silent that Hilda's hand stole timidly toward him, touching his knee. His own closed over hers, and for some minutes they sat thus, without speaking. It was a warm night, with a wild damp wind that blew in their faces. On the shore below the sea pounded heavily. A scudding rain obscured all lights except those of a steamer that bobbed up and down as she passed eastward to Newport or Fall River. Within the house at this late hour all was still. The only lamp left burning was the hanging one in the hall, which threw dim rays into the living-room.

With this evening Charlie Grace was entering on what he called the last act. Up to a few minutes ago he had been doing it triumphantly, the jocular spirit standing by him throughout the day. He had telephoned to Ralph Coningsby to come down and spend the afternoon, and at dinner they had pledged his happiness and Esther's in champagne. It gratified him that Hilda should perceive his lead and follow it. Though she did so with some mystification at his mood, she played up, as he expressed it, as effectively as on the day of the luncheon with Hattie Bright. It was only after Ralph Coningsby had gone to the station, and Esther had retired, that husband and wife could speak with each other alone.

"Hilda, come here," he had said, and she followed him out into the misty darkness. After the heat of the day the damp wind was refreshing, while the darkness was a relief to both of them. She came to him obediently, crouching on a footstool that stood near his chair. He felt that she had no idea how he

was going to take her extraordinary act in bringing Esther Legrand to Rosyth. He knew it by the questioning looks with which she had watched him during the day, as well as by the way in which she now sat humbly silent, waiting for him to speak. It was long before he was able to find what seemed to him the right words. He did his best to be gentle, without being able to keep an inflection of reproach altogether out of his voice.

"What made you do it?"

There was a catch, a sob, in her throat as she said: "It was that poor woman, Hattie Bright. How could I refuse to do what she was capable of doing?"

So for a few minutes they talked, till silence fell between them. For Hilda there was at least the reassurance that his hand closed over hers as it rested on his knee.

As for Charlie Grace, he passed from the thought of his own moral disintegration to say to himself, "So it was Hattie—poor old Hattie!" It made the mystery of life deeper when he went on to add, "And it was Ellis—poor old Ellis!" While he could explain nothing to Hilda, seeing that she still believed Hattie to have begged her to come to the luncheon at the Blitz, yet it struck him as singular that Ellis's revenge and Hattie's moral code should have given to a good woman like Hilda the impulse to what was, after all, the sublime act of her life. It might have been a foolish act, or a misguided act, or the act of a woman frantic or morbid with self-reproach, but he made no question as to its nobility. And without Ellis she might never have thought of it; without Hattie she might never have been spurred to such

self-abnegation; and without the self-abnegation he might never have come to feel, as he felt now, that he knew her at last. He pressed her hand—timidly, on his part—he pushed his chair a little nearer her as his mind dwelt on the complicated nature of human relationships and the interweaving of fates.

It was Hilda who broke the silence, speaking tremulously.

"If you think that by asking her to come here I put her in a dangerous position—which is what I gather you do think—I want to say that you can't put a woman like that in a dangerous position—not any more than they could put Daniel in a dangerous position when they threw him into a den of lions. Goodness is a protection in itself. And more than that: where you have good people, only good things can happen."

"And among the good things that might happen was one of them that you and I—should part?"

"I didn't go as far as that, Charlie. I didn't look ahead at all. I didn't know what might happen. I didn't really care—so long as the best thing happened for you."

"But what did you think that would be?—the best thing for me."

"I had no idea. I couldn't see. I couldn't think. If it had come to that—to our parting—I should have had to bring myself to it. I felt that you were ill and unhappy—that you were like a prisoner—shut in and longing for—the sky! Oh, Charlie, don't blame me too much. I dare say I was all wrong—but I did the best I could."

She bowed her head on the back of his hand that held hers. He could feel two or three tears fall on

it. "I'm not blaming you, darling. I only feel—I *have* to feel—how utterly—how horribly—unworthy I am."

She lifted her head to say, suddenly, "Was I so very wrong, then, Charlie?"

He gained a moment's time by parrying her question. "Wrong about what?"

"About thinking that you did long to see—the sky?"

He considered the wisdom of answering this, taking his time. During a space of three or four minutes there was no sound but that of the monotonous thundering of the waves on the shore below them. "Why do you want to know?" he asked, as the result of his thinking.

"I don't want to know if you'd rather not tell me."

Again the billows broke with monotonous crashing while he reflected. "It isn't so much that I don't want to tell you as that there's nothing to tell." The truth of these words, which seemed to utter themselves without his volition, impressed him so much that he proceeded to enlarge on them. He spoke slowly, with hesitations, searching for the right expressions. "It's very curious, Hilda . . . but there are times in life when certain things . . . interests or emotions . . . or whatever you like to call them . . . seem to come to an end. . . . They not only come to an end . . . but they go out of existence. . . . They not only go out of existence as regards the future . . . but they're dissolved as regards the past. . . . They're as if they hadn't been. . . . They never *were*. . . . I can't explain it. . . . You wouldn't understand it if I could explain. . . .

You'd have to go through just this sort of experience. . . ."

"What sort of experience, Charlie, dear?"

Again he was obliged to reflect as to what he could and what he could not tell her. It was a question of being merciful. Would it be easier for her to know at once, and so prepare herself? Or was it best to let the happenings of the next two years bring conviction gradually home to her? He didn't know. He could only temporize. "That's also something I can't explain. . . . You'll see . . . by degrees. All I can tell you now is that there *is* something that acts as a kind of solvent. . . . The things that are not essential to us . . . that don't really belong to us . . . seem to melt in it . . . melt . . . dissolve . . . is the only word I can find . . . while the things that are really permanent to us remain."

"It must be a very great experience indeed that can work such a change as that."

"It *is* a very great experience indeed."

She raised her head again, peering up at him through the darkness. "Charlie, have you seen a doctor while I've been away?"

He knew there were certain things he must tell her, and that he might as well do it now. "Yes; that's it. I've been to see Furny. I went also to see an old chap he recommended, a Dr. Valenty."

"I've heard of him."

"They both say I'm in pretty bad shape . . . and that I must . . . be careful." She drew closer to him, pressing his hand to her lips. "I shall have to give up . . . my job . . . and go slow. . . . Next winter we shall have to go away somewhere . . . to Florida, or the Riviera, or some other warm climate.

. . . After that . . . we must . . . see." He knew she was about to ask a question, and hurried on before she could speak. "And when a man comes to that . . . he begins to realize that . . . that there's a difference in life between the . . . the vital . . . and the non-essential. . . . You're the vital to me, Hilda . . . you and the kids. . . . There's nothing else."

She kissed his hand again and again. "Oh, Charlie, my beloved! And I was trying to make myself think that perhaps I ought to — to let you go!"

His hand rested lightly on her hair. "That's where you were wrong, dear . . . and yet you were right, too. . . . Perhaps if you hadn't done it the solvent wouldn't have worked. . . . I don't know . . . I'm too confused about the whole thing . . . I'm all astray. . . . I'm like a man wandering in a labyrinth that he'll never get out of. . . . I've been a bad fellow, Hilda . . . and now I see what it's made of me. . . . I don't know that it does any good to talk about it . . . and as a matter of fact there's more than I can tell you in words . . . but you'll see for yourself . . . as time goes on. . . . In the mean while . . . one great thing is clear, Hilda . . . I've found you . . . I know you . . . I know you as I didn't know you . . . and I shall never leave you . . . nor let you leave me . . . till I . . . till I . . . die."

She threw back her head, grasping his arm passionately. "Oh no; you don't know me, Charlie. You don't know how hard and narrow and cruel I've been. I never knew it myself until I saw something big and generous in that poor Hattie Bright. Or, rather, I

did know it—but the knowledge was frozen inside me. She seemed to set it free. She made me—human. She showed me how a woman who's had all the chances can be petty and mean—and—and—jealous—yes, wickedly jealous—and that another who's had everything—or nearly everything—against her can still be fine. There's something I must tell you, Charlie. I must. It's a confession. I can't rest till I've made it. When I said a few weeks ago that I wouldn't—wouldn't release you—it wasn't for the children's sake, as I said it was. Or, at least, it was only a little for their sakes. It was chiefly for my own. I was thinking of myself and my claims first of all. I was proud; I was self-centered. I wanted to hold you. I wanted to make you feel that you were mine—that you couldn't get away. I wanted to make you suffer—as I had suffered. But, oh, Charlie! when I saw you *were* suffering I couldn't bear it. It was easier for me to give you up—if I had to—if it were to come to that—than to see you so worn and unhappy—"

He slipped his hand over her lips. "Hush, hush, hush!" he whispered. "What does it matter now? Don't let us explain any more—either of us. As far as I'm concerned, I love you, Hilda. I know I love you. I don't love—any one else—not this way. I see now—let me say it once for all—that even the sky will be to me in future—just the sky."

"Very high and pure and above us," she said, softly.

"If you like. But for the rest, the only important thing is that we've found each other at last; and now it will be till death us do part. Won't it?"

For a few minutes she sobbed quietly. Of the things he had to bring home to her he was glad to

see that for the moment very little had found its way. There would be time enough for that.

On the Wednesday following, Esther Legrand, finding the need of her presence at Rosyth less urgent than she had supposed, went up to Vandiver Place. On Friday she wrote to say, among other things, that Remnant had taken a turn for the worse, and would probably not recover. She begged Hilda to ask her husband, when he was next in town, to look in on the old man, to whom the visit would be a comfort. This Charlie Grace accomplished early in the succeeding week, finding it a new experience.

He had not been in the part of the long straight street, crossing Manhattan Island from river to river, in which Remnant had his lodging, since he was a boy. Even then the neighborhood had taken on the shabby-genteel character which it had retained in spite of that march of progress which in New York generally converts the shabby-genteel into a slum. The worst that could be said of it now was that many of its blocks were the haunt of fruitful families of Semitic or Slavic origin, who confided their broods to the streets as cheerfully as a duck yields hers to the water. If they strewed the pavements with refuse, and now and then some promising infant lost its life beneath a horse's hoofs or the wheels of a dray, it was no more than was to be expected of an arrangement in which the same half-mile stretch served as nursery, playground, and thoroughfare at once, defying the most enthusiastic scavenger.

Fortunately for his self-respect, Remnant's last earthly residence lay outside the Semitic and Slavic spheres of influence, in a part of the long street that,

like the thin red line at Balaklava, still held out for Anglo-Saxon domination, contributing most of the genuine parishioners to St. David's. It was safe to say that Rufus Legrand was loved and revered by all the occupants of these modest brick and brownstone dwellings even while they deprecated his whimsical policy of treating Poles and Russians and Jews as men of like passions with "born" Americans and natives of the British Isles. These feelings could easily have been ascribed to the plump little lady who opened the door to Charlie Grace, in one of the houses of a row standing back from the street, from which it was secluded by tiny grass-plots and much cast-iron railing. Two or three grimy acacia trees, with the gaunt, expatriated look of jungle animals caged in a northern zoo, emphasized the dignity of the row, as compared with its surroundings. The plump little lady greeted Charlie Grace with a smile.

"Won't you step in, sir? Mr. Remnant will be very pleased to see you. I know who you are, sir; because he never stops talking of Mr. Gryce. He's so fond of you, sir, that I fill right up every time he mentions your nyme."

The plump little lady had a cheerful English complexion and a sweet English voice to which the cockney accent was only a charm. Charlie Grace accepted her invitation and stepped into the narrow hall, from which a straight staircase, curving slightly at the top, led to the next floor.

"I'm sorry I didn't know he was so ill or I would have come before."

"He *is* bad, sir, and very 'ard to tyke care of, through being so impatient. He's not used to being treated as a sick man, which makes him use language

I shouldn't 'ave expected from one who'd been so long in the Church. I couldn't repeat it, sir, not if it was ever so. It makes me fill right up to 'ear him. There's only one person who can control him, sir, and that's the young lydy. She's with him now, sir, if you'll be pleased to step up. I'm sure she won't mind. The door on the left at the 'ead of the stairs, sir. You'll find it 'alf open, so as to give him the air."

At the curve toward the top of the stairs he could already hear Esther's voice, and when on the landing outside the door he could catch her words. He saw her through the opening, though she did not see him. She had apparently not heard him, either, for she was leaning maternally toward Remnant, one hand resting lightly on the brass knob at the head of his little iron bedstead, while the other fanned him slowly with an old palm-leaf fan. Remnant's bed being turned away from the door, all that Charlie Grace could see of the old man himself was the top of the little gray head—on which the long hair was tousled and thin—just emerging from the pillow. Directly opposite the half-open door was an antiquated chimney-piece of black marble, streaked with yellow. Above it hung a faded photograph of the Tower of London, evidently furnished by the plump little lady, while the fireplace was occupied by a paper Japanese parasol, artistically open. On the mantelpiece stood Remnant's particular treasures, among them, as Charlie Grace was touched to see, an old photograph of his own mother seated at a table, her chin resting pensively on her hand, her chignon and flounces displayed in a three-quarters view, and a larger picture of the old rector of St. David's, wearing his surplice and stole, and framed in glued fir-cones.

It was because Esther seemed to be saying something special that Charlie Grace hesitated to go in.

"I don't know whether you'll like it as much as I do, Remnant, but I'll say it to you, and you can see. It's a translation from the German that I cut from the *Church Weekly* ever so long ago. I've said it to a good many sick people, and they generally *have* liked it."

"You can please yourself, miss," Remnant said, querulously. "I don't hold much with them *Church Weeklys;* never no news in 'em. A good murder, now, or a trial—that's the kind o' readin' I like. But Miss Smedley was forever dosing me with them *Church Weeklys.* There ain't a good murder goin' on now, miss, is there, do you know? If there was it 'u'd kind o' cheer me up."

"I don't know, Remnant; but I'll find out. I'll ask Mr. Coningsby. It begins with the words from St. John's Gospel: 'Lord, we know not whither thou goest, and how can we know the way? Jesus saith unto him, I am the Way. . . . No man cometh unto the Father but by me.' It begins—"

But Charlie Grace slipped down to the end of the narrow hall, where he stood looking out into the street, while Esther repeated the verses. Her voice reached him only as a faint murmur, though the phrases he caught now and then brought back to him the didactic, pietistic literature that had been familiar to him in his youth. Given the text she had announced, he could almost, from old memories, have fitted the words to it himself. For the first time in his life it struck him as inconceivable that any living being could ever have said, "I am the Way," and have found others ready to take him seriously. He

felt that he had never before done justice to that extraordinary fact.

He crept back to Remnant's door as Esther was beginning on her closing verse. Making him a sign of welcome, she pointed to a chair within the room, continuing her recitation. It was not, however, till she had brought the lines to an end that he obeyed her, tiptoeing in, so as not to disturb her conversation with the old man.

"Do you see what it means, Remnant?" she asked, as she arranged the sheet more comfortably beneath his chin.

His reply came with a complaining sigh. "If I can't understand that, miss, it's time I did. But I never could abide them *Church Weeklys*." He added, with another sigh, "There's something I should like to ask you, miss."

"Ask me anything you like, dear Remnant, and if I can I'll answer you."

"It's something I should more fitter ask your pa, miss; but him and me don't see eye to eye about religion, as old Dr. Grace used to say. 'Remnant,' he'd say, just like that, miss; 'you and me don't see eye to eye,' he'd say. He'd say it about dust or he'd say it about dinner. It didn't matter to him, miss. It was just, 'Remnant, you and me don't see eye to eye!' Ah, them was times, miss. Nothin' like it now. Your pa is a good man, and I wouldn't set you agin him for the world; only he don't understand religion. Never did. I mind him when he first come back from England, after he'd got his eddication, like—tall, fine man he was, and your ma the prettiest little piece you'd see in Broadway. She knowed religion right off, she did. Had a natural

born turn for it, you might say. Keep the church decent, was her motto. Keep out the riffraff; but your pa—"

Esther looked over the bed toward Charlie Grace, who was smiling quietly. "Didn't you say there was something you wanted to ask me, Remnant? I'll answer it if I can, you know."

"Yes, miss, there is; but I don't hardly like to trouble you with it. Religion's all to pieces nowadays."

"If I can do anything or say anything that will help you, Remnant—"

"Well, it's just this, miss. Do you know if that there Jimmy Page has taken down the furnace pipes and cleaned 'em for the summer?"

"I don't know; but I can find out."

"Like as not he hasn't; and they'll rust and wear out, and next winter the heat 'll not go along 'em. That's another thing in which me and your pa don't agree—having a convick to work about the church."

"Oh, he isn't a convict, exactly, Remnant. He was in jail for a while, it's true; but he's trying to do his best, and he found it very hard to get work. Who should help a man like that if it isn't the Church?"

"And that's how religion gets a bad name, miss, if you'll allow me to say so—not keeping respectable. He don't think about the Church, he don't. It's theayters he thinks about. He's been twice to the theayter since he's been out o' jail. What do you think o' that? Ah, well; I hope Miss Smedley won't take it into her head to pop off while I'm here on this bed o' sickness. She'd never get over it, to be buried by that there Jimmy Page; and I don't

believe as I should ever get over it, neither. I pray as the Lord 'll spare me to bury old Miss Smedley. I don't ask for no more than that. Then I'll have nearly all the old gang under ground—except Mr. Charlie and one or two others. I used to think as I might live to bury him; but I've given up the hope o' that, now as I'm so sick—"

Charlie Grace got up and went forward. "Oh, I wouldn't do that, if I were you, Remnant," he laughed. "There's no telling. You may get the job yet."

"Well, well, well, well, *well!* To think as you was there a-listenin' to me, sonny, and me not knowin' it. Well, well! I haven't had nothing so auxilarating since I was sick, have I, miss?"

A gleam came back into the little old eyes not unlike the twinkle of thirty years earlier. Nevertheless, Charlie Grace was shocked by the change illness had wrought in his lifelong friend. The skin was shriveled; eyes, cheeks, and mouth were sunken; the chin was stubby with a week's growth of grisly beard. It made the approach of death the more abhorrent, the more appalling. There was an instant in which he pictured himself passing into this stage and taking this way.

While greetings were being exchanged the girl rose, bidding Remnant good-by for the afternoon. She had a few things to talk over with Mrs. Williams, the plump lady, she said, and after giving small touches about the room went down-stairs.

Left alone with the sick man, Charlie Grace felt himself helpless. He could think of little or nothing to say. He examined the little table beside the bed, on which were medicines, iced water, and a bell. He

followed with his eye the outlines of Remnant's wizened form, which scarcely undulated the quilt of red and white diamonds that covered it. Remnant himself did most of the talking. Except for a slight quaver, his voice was as strong as ever. His remarks turned on the subjects he had most at heart—the church, the furnaces, the putting in of next winter's coal, the insufficiency of Jimmy Page. Charlie Grace tried to speak consolingly. He spoke artfully, too—for his own purposes.

"Well, I wouldn't fret about it, Remnant, if I were you. It 'll be all the same a hundred years hence."

But Remnant was not comforted. "I've got nothing to do with what 'll be a hundred years hence, Mr. Charlie. It ain't all the same *now*."

"Where do you think we shall be a hundred years hence—you and I?"

There was a sudden canny glitter in Remnant's glance. "Are you askin' me that because you think I'm going to die, Mr. Charlie?"

"No; but because I think I'm going to."

"Oh, sho! Mr. Charlie. You ain't going to die for a long spell yet; whereas I—"

"You—what, Remnant?" Charlie Grace was really curious to know what was in Remnant's mind. He was curious to see whether his dim soul held hopes or fears or faiths. "You—what, Remnant?" he said again.

But the old man turned his face to the wall. "Oh, nothing."

Charlie Grace persisted. "You don't *think* you're going to die, do you?"

He spoke sadly. "Oh, I do' know about that. I shouldn't wonder."

"And if you did, Remnant, what do you think would happen to you?"

The reply took the questioner by surprise. Remnant looked round quickly. "I'll have to leave it to God to look after that, sonny. It 'll be up to Him."

Charlie Grace persisted still. "And you're not afraid of Him?—of God?"

Remnant gave a little sniff. "I've been forty-odd year sexton of His house, tryin' to make it clean and respectable, and keep out the riffraff. I guess He's not the one to go back on a' old servant. If I was going to be afraid of Him, sonny, I ought to ha' begun before now."

Charlie Grace had no more questions to ask. After all, this was faith, the very heart of faith. It summed up Remnant's duty toward God and his neighbor as he understood it, and went still further. After this discovery the conversation flagged, and presently Charlie Grace rose to go.

"You must let me know if there's anything I can do for you, old boy—anything you would like, or that Mrs. Grace could send you."

There was another gleam in the little eyes. "Thank you, Mr. Charlie. There *is* something I should like. I haven't wanted to ask Miss Esther. She's such a' angel, she's thought o' everything —but this."

"What is it, Remnant? I can't tell you what a pleasure it will give me."

"It's a nice bit o' sausage, Mr. Charlie. This here Mrs. Williams don't give me nothing but beef-tea and slops o' that kind. But I feel as if a nice bit o' sausage, cooked till it splits—that's the way I like it, Mr. Charlie—'u'd do me good."

"You shall have it, Remnant, if it's to be found in New York."

"Thank you, Mr. Charlie. It's just as if you was a son to me. And there's one other thing."

"Yes? What is it?"

"If I do die, Mr. Charlie, I have money in the bank, and my will made reg'lar, with three witnesses, and everything lawful. All I've got 'll go to Miss Esther—all except a little present to you, sonny. Oh, it won't be much," he hastened to add, as Charlie Grace colored and blew his nose; "just enough to buy you a little something to remember me by."

"I don't need anything to help me to do that, Remnant," he managed to say.

"I know you don't, sonny; but I like to think you'll have it. But there's this thing. The lawyers 'll pay for my funeral; only I'd like you to see that it 'll be a *good* funeral, Mr. Charlie."

"It will be the very best, Remnant."

"If I didn't speak about it beforehand they might put me off with a cheap second-hand affair, thinking it 'u'd be good enough. But I shouldn't want that at all, Mr. Charlie—me that has had so much to do with funerals all my life."

"Naturally."

"And if you could come to the church yourself, sonny—and sit in the top pew on the right, where you used to sit with your ma when you was a little boy—"

"Of course I will; and Mrs. Grace will come, too."

"I don't suppose poor old Miss Smedley 'll be able to hobble out, even if she don't go before me; but if Miss Fanny Hornblower is in town—"

"I'll see that she comes, Remnant. And I'll have the Furnivals, and any others of the old crowd I can think of. You leave it all to me."

Remnant sighed, contentedly. He seemed tired. "That 'll be very pleasant, very pleasant indeed. It's just as if you was a son to me, Mr. Charlie. And there's one more thing." Charlie Grace waited. "Will you just see that that there Jimmy Page has the trestles well dusted for the coffin to stand on? He's an awful poor hand to dust—thinking of his theayters. I wouldn't be buried by him at all—not by a convick, I wouldn't be—only for not wanting to hurt the feelings o' poor Parson Legrand. He's a good man, Parson Legrand; but he don't understand religion. Never did, and never will."

Having given the necessary assurances as to the dusting of the trestles by Jimmy Page, Charlie Grace shook hands with his old friend, promising to come soon again; but the intimacy which had begun, so to speak, with his birth, and survived all the changes in his career, had come to its earthly end.

CHAPTER VIII

WHEN Charlie Grace came down the stairs Esther was in the act of saying good-by to Mrs. Williams. He and she, therefore, left the house together. Through the respective spheres of Anglo-Saxon, Slavic, and Semitic influence they passed along side by side toward Vandiver Place. Progress was rendered slow by the necessity of exchanging remarks with occasional mothers, and responding to cries of "Hullo, Miss Legra-a-ne!" from urchins and elfins in the street. It was only on reaching the comparative calm of the regions given up to commerce that Charlie Grace found the opportunity to say:

"How much do you believe of that hymn you were repeating to Remnant?"

She glanced at him from beneath the rim of her parasol. The little primrose-colored freckles across her nose were the more golden because of a light seashore tan. "Why, I believe all of it."

"But what *makes* you believe it?"

She took a minute for reflection. "I suppose I believe it because I know."

"Yes; but how do you know?"

She was obliged to reflect again. "I don't know how I know. I only—know."

"You know because you've heard the same thing said so often that you take it for granted. Isn't that so?"

"That's partly it. I suppose I know because father told me, in the first place; and because I found it in the Bible, in the next; and then because I proved it was true—by my own experience."

"What sort of experience?"

"Oh, I can hardly tell you that. But it's been real experience—just as real as any one's." She added, later: "And yet none of these things answers what you asked me. Now that I think of it, I see that there's something else—something over and above them—and more important than any of them—and I know most of all by—*that*."

"By that? By what?"

She shook her head. "I can't tell you. It's like an extra sense that you couldn't describe to any one who didn't have it, too."

"That's hard on the people who haven't got it, isn't it?"

"Oh, but everybody has it. I'm sure they must have it. It can't be anything that's given especially to me—and a few others. That wouldn't be just. Everybody *must* have it. Only"—she reflected again—"only — if you don't use it it must become atrophied. Wouldn't that be it?"

"That would be it, if you choose to take it so. But I don't see any compulsion for taking it so."

"You can't help taking it so—if the extra sense isn't atrophied."

They walked on for some minutes in silence. "I'm sorry it depends on the possession of an extra sense," he said, returning to a topic from which, apparently, he couldn't keep away, "because I've only got the ordinary five."

"I didn't say it *depended* on an extra one; I said

the extra one confirmed the knowledge of it. And so it does. But if you reject the idea to begin with —why, then, the confirmation isn't of any good, is it?" She let the parasol dip to one side to throw him one of her frank smiles. "What makes you fight against it so?"

He started. "Fight against it? *Am* I fighting against it?"

"Well, aren't you? You seem to me to be fighting against it like a man"—she threw him another smile—"like a man who's afraid he's going to give in."

If this was a challenge he ignored it to say: "I used to believe it—in a way. But I saw what it made of people."

"Oh, that's no test," she said, quickly. "The only proof is in seeing what it can make of *you.* That's what helps us to distinguish between what it *does* make of people and what it *can.* The touchstone has to be within oneself." As they neared the corner of Vandiver Place she went on to say: "But if you want to discuss these things, won't you come in and talk to father? He knows about them, and I don't. I only know what I'm convinced of myself; and very likely I can't give you the correct reasons even so."

"And what about the great news?" he asked, as they took the turning toward the rectory. "Has Coningsby told it yet?"

"Oh yes; and it's all right. That is, it's all right with father. Poor mother takes it rather hardly. Of course it's a disappointment to her, and Ralph and I must recognize the fact."

He tried to laugh. "I don't see how she could

have expected you to marry a rich man if, as you say, none ever turned up."

"No; nor I. But poor mother thinks one would have turned up if I'd waited. In fact, she says she knew of one—if I'd only given him time."

"But why did he need time?"

"That's what I want to know. Mother says it was because everything wasn't smooth sailing for the poor man, but that he would have got the difficulties cleared out of the way so as to ask me—if I hadn't been in such a hurry."

He hesitated over his next question, deciding in the end to ask it. "Have you any idea who it is?"

"Not the slightest. I really don't think it's any one. Poor mama is fanciful about things of that kind. She can make herself believe anything she likes."

"And are you sorry you didn't wait?"

The answer was in a sidelong glance of the violet eyes—a shy glance, but one that was also full of laughter.

He felt nothing strange in being able to talk to her in this way, with no sense of loss on his side. If there was anything strange it was in the fact that she hadn't, through all these years, been engaged to Ralph Coningsby, with his own blessing on the match. He himself had traveled far beyond all interests of the kind. He differed from Remnant in that respect. Remnant could carry his mortal preoccupations right up to the gates of death, and beyond them. He could be concerned for the furnace pipes and the winter's coal for seasons when he should not be here. Undoubtedly this was the larger view; but he, Charlie Grace, was incapable

of taking it. For him the mortal was as if it had already passed; and Esther Legrand, with all the dreams she had inspired, had passed with it. His mind could give itself now only to the possibilities that might arise when this mortal should have put on immortality—if any such transmutation were ever to take place.

For this reason he plunged into the heart of the subject as soon as he was seated in the study, face to face with Rufus Legrand. He dismissed the rector's explanations of the plans for the memorial parish-house by saying:

"The reason I want the thing put through pretty quickly is that I'm going to die."

At sixty-four years of age it was not often that Rufus Legrand was startled; but now he showed his dismay. The long, ascetic face grew ashen, and the eyes lost their mild, searching light. "What do you mean, Charlie?"

The younger man told the tale of his illness and his interviews with the physicians. "They give me two years," he said, in conclusion. "That will mean a little more or a little less, as the case may be."

Legrand rose from his chair in the corner, and, coming forward, stood with his hands resting on the shoulders of the man whom he had known from his childhood upward, looking down into his eyes. "This is one of the hardest situations, Charlie, I've ever seen a man forced to meet; but I know you'll have the pluck to face it."

With Legrand's hands resting still on his shoulders, Charlie Grace turned his face away. "I have the pluck, all right; I haven't anything else."

"What else is there? What else do you mean —in your case?"

Charlie Grace smiled. "I like the 'in *your* case.'"

Legrand removed his hands, standing with his back to the empty fireplace in an attitude reminding Charlie Grace of his own father, on the same spot. "Precisely," he said, almost dryly. "We must speak to the case in point, mustn't we? From what I've understood you to say, pluck would be the highest thing you could furnish—in the circumstances. Isn't that so?"

"Quite so. I've nothing else."

"In that case, Charlie, my dear boy, all I can do is to be with you as much as I can in heart—as I am —you must know that—and pray for you in silence. I—I always do pray for you."

Charlie Grace got up and began stalking about the room. He was dissatisfied, even disappointed. Legrand's method of disposing of him without argument, or effort at convincing him, always produced in him a sense of irritation. "You're a queer man, Mr. Legrand," was all he could say now.

"Am I? I suppose we all have our idiosyncrasies. I don't hurt your feelings in any way, do I?"

"No; not exactly." He turned on him abruptly. "I've got pluck; but you've got something else. What is it?"

Legrand looked at him long. "Can't you answer that question for yourself?"

"I can answer it for myself as far as the mere phrases go. I can't get at what's behind the words."

"Do you mean that you can't—or that in your heart of hearts you don't want to?"

Charlie Grace started again to stalk about the room. "In my heart of hearts I don't care anything about it. The thing is not for me—whatever it is. I'm only curious."

"Curious—why?"

"Curious to see people do in one way the thing I've got to do in another."

"You mean—die?"

He nodded, while he continued his pacing. "That kind of curiosity seems to me fairly legitimate, however it may shock you."

"It doesn't shock me—put in that way. But may I ask how it is that *you've* got to do it?"

Charlie Grace smiled, shrugging his shoulders. "That rather stumps me. I suppose I've got to do it on the principle of—grin and bear it."

"The Stoic's principle. And how do you imagine the other people, of whom you've just been speaking, do it?"

"That's what I want you to tell me."

"Have you had no experience that would enable you to judge for yourself?"

Charlie Grace paused in his walk, looking down meditatively at his boots. "I've seen a few people die—not many—men who would have been called Christians, in a general way—who got Christian burial, at any rate. They've been all sorts, from good men like my father to rough specimens in the Northwest. I can't say"—he spoke slowly—"I can't say that their religion made the dying any easier for them."

"Did it do anything for them at all?"

He looked up suddenly. "Sometimes—yes."

"What?"

"I don't know. Or if I do know I can't express it. It—it gave them something to look forward to."

"Something—good?"

Charlie Grace contemplated his boots for a minute or two more. "I don't believe that that was the first consideration—whether it was good or not. It was something."

"And anything is better than nothing. Is that it?"

"That's something like it."

"And was it all?"

"It wasn't always all. It wasn't all, for example, in such cases as my father's."

"And what was it, then?"

He resumed his walk. "That's something you must know better than I."

"I'm not sure of that—not by any means. If you'd tell me how it struck you—"

"It struck me like this—and I can't put it better than in your own words—that they saw a certain—Door; and they walked right up to it."

For the first time since the beginning of the conversation Legrand's face was illumined by its peculiar smile. "Well, what's to hinder you from doing the same?"

Charlie Grace frowned, striding more rapidly. "Oh, lots of things. I'm not that sort."

"You're not that sort—why?"

"Oh, for hundreds of reasons," he said, shortly. "It would be absurd."

"And of the hundreds of reasons would it be possible for you to give me one?"

"I can give you them all in a word. I use the word because it will appeal to you—not that it means anything in particular to me. It's—Sin."

"Oh, is that all?"

"It's all; but in my case it covers a good deal of ground." He stopped, taking hold of the back of Legrand's revolving chair, and confronting the rector across the desk littered with papers. "A chap—his name was Ellis—once called me in a public place 'the damnedest hound unhung.' I ran away from him at the time because I knew it was true; and now I know it better."

"That's a very good beginning."

"But a damned poor end. Excuse the word, sir."

"Yes; it *is* a damned poor end—if you make it the end."

"What else *can* you make it?"

"I've just said that; the beginning—the beginning of—walking right up to—the Door."

Charlie Grace nodded his head up and down ironically. "And after having had all the fun of this world start in to get the best of the next. That's where I take issue with your religion first of all, sir. It seems to me unmanly—and immoral. It's like buying a thing and sneaking out of the price."

Legrand, whose eyes were downcast, looked up with a peculiar expression. "Have you been getting all the fun of this world? It doesn't seem to me much fun to have to consider oneself the damnedest hound unhung."

Charlie Grace colored. "That's not the fun. It's the price of it."

"A pretty steep price, isn't it?"

"It *is* a steep price, but—"

"But the fun was worth it. Is that what you were going to say?"

"N-no."

"Then the fun wasn't worth it?"

He replied somewhat reluctantly. "Hardly."

"So that you've been cheated."

"I can't say that I've been cheated. It's rather, perhaps, that I've been—surprised."

"Surprised, that is to say, by the disproportion between the penalty and the crime."

"Oh, the crime was bad enough. I don't want to underrate the gravity of that."

"But haven't you noticed that Sin is always its own most merciless accuser? If it condones for a while it's to make punishment the more pitiless in the end. It's only goodness—otherwise God—that draws the distinction between a temporal offense and an eternal penalty—and consequently yearns to forgive."

Charlie Grace hung his head moodily. "Even so, it would seem to me something like a miscarriage of justice if I were to go scot free."

"*Have* you gone scot free? Is it going scot free to call yourself—to be obliged to call yourself—the damnedest hound unhung?"

He flushed again, more hotly. "Oh, but when I *am!* If you only knew me! There's hardly anything I haven't done—or been willing to do. Take an instance. Where do you suppose I was?—what do you suppose I was doing?—the night my little boy was born? Ellis couldn't have put the thing better if he'd been with me."

"Well, since you know that—since you're so convinced of it—wouldn't it be only fair that there should be an advocate to speak in your defense? The most primitive of courts allows that."

The reply was almost surly. "I've got no defense. For the things I've done—"

"There's no excuse. Granted. But human personality is a big thing, Charlie, and a strange thing. We know very little about it, as a matter of fact. It comes into the world trailing clouds of glory from subliminal states we're only beginning to make guesses at. If I know anything about you, and you know anything about me, it's no more than simple people know of a star when they see a faint point of light millions of miles away." His tone changed slightly as he went on to add: "You've been a great sinner, Charlie—don't let us balk at the word, since it expresses what we both mean—you've been a great sinner. But to say that sin must necessarily destroy a personality like yours, with its gifts and its goodness and its incalculable value, is like saying that some great and beautiful garden must be trampled down or rooted up because there are weeds in it. Get rid of your weeds—and you still have the garden."

There was long silence, during which Charlie Grace continued to grasp the back of the revolving chair, swinging it nervously this way and that, his eyes fixed absently on the litter of papers strewing the desk. When he looked up it was to come forward resolutely, his hand outstretched. His head was thrown back and his chin tilted defiantly, though he smiled.

"It sounds very nice, sir—very beautiful and plausible—but I guess I'll take my medicine."

Legrand grasped the offered hand, smiling also. With his free hand he stroked Charlie Grace's wavy hair back from his forehead as though the latter were a boy. "Do you know what you make me think of, Charlie?" He looked tenderly into the

sick, sad eyes, of which the irregular fair brows were lifted in an expression of inquiry. "It's of the young man of whom we're told that Jesus—beholding him —*loved* him, and said unto him, 'One thing thou lackest.' It seems to me," he went on slowly, still with a gentle smile, "that you lack but one thing—now; and that you'll find it."

But Charlie Grace wrenched his hand away, and was gone.

That was on a Wednesday; and on the following Saturday at noon Remnant died, sleeping away quietly, as old people often do.

Having received the news by telephone, Charlie Grace motored at once to the city to redeem his promise as to the funeral. He found the old man still lying in the bed in much the same attitude as that in which he had died. But the alteration in his face was striking. All that was sunken and bleared had been transmuted into a gently smiling youth, while there was a radiance of expression which the living Remnant had never shown. Charlie Grace had heard the physical explanation of this phenomenon, and yet he found it difficult to give it all the credit for the change.

It was a satisfaction to him, during the next forty-eight hours, to superintend the fulfilment of Remnant's last requests. For the grave he selected an attractive spot in one of the suburban cemeteries; he saw that the coffin was as good as money could buy; he cautioned Jimmy Page as to the dusting of the trestles; and he wrote to a number of the former parishioners of St. David's, begging them to do the old man the last favor of attending the services on

Tuesday afternoon. On Tuesday afternoon he and Hilda, with the little boy, Billy, and Esther Legrand, acted as chief mourners, driving directly behind the hearse from the house in the Anglo-Saxon sphere of influence to the church.

Up to the minute of reaching the church he had carried out these duties as a pious matter of course. He had a sentiment for Remnant such as moved him toward no one else outside his own family. He could still hear the trembling, querulous voice saying: "It's just as if you was a son to me, Mr. Charlie." Never having been able really to assume cares on behalf of his own father, he was specially content in doing something for one who was so closely associated with the traditions of his youth.

But it was while they stood in the church porch that he began to feel in the fulfilment of his task an element higher than the reverently perfunctory. The coffin covered with flowers having been placed on the bier, he and Hilda stood behind it—Esther and the little boy coming after them. Suddenly the doors were thrown open and Rufus Legrand, in surplice and stole, began to precede them up the aisle.

"I am the Resurrection, and the Life, saith the Lord: he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die."

It was the Voice which, as a Voice, had not sounded in his ears since the day when they had carried his mother to the little graveyard at Horsehair Hill. He had heard the same words often enough since then, as he had followed one and another where he was following Remnant now; but they had brought him no message. Coming out of the half-empty

church the Voice had the effect of the mysterious call they seemed to have followed; his mother first, his father next, and Remnant last of the three. Remnant seemed to be following it still—in—in—forward—forward—while he pressed along behind. It was Remnant to-day; it would be himself to-morrow—in—in—forward—forward—on—on.

He was not, however, so preoccupied but that he could notice, with the subconscious perceptions at least, that a fair number of the old friends had rallied in response to his call. Miss Smedley was there; Mrs. Furnival was there; Furny himself was there; Mrs. Legrand was there; Ralph Coningsby was there; there was even a representation of the riffraff Remnant would have scorned. Solemnly, insistently, the Voice went on:

"Lord, let me know mine end, and the number of my days, that I may be certified how long I have to live. Behold thou hast made my days as it were a span long, and mine age is even as nothing in respect of thee, and verily every man living is altogether vanity. For man walketh in a vain shadow and disquieteth himself in vain; he heapeth up riches and cannot tell who shall gather them. And now, Lord, what is my hope?"

The response came as out of the composite heart of humankind. "Truly, my hope is even in thee."

The words were familiar to him from old associations. They were, indeed, so familiar that he thought himself proof against the way in which they caught him up now into a world of which the length and breadth and depth and height were of more majestic proportions than any he had ever allowed

his spirit to frequent. Though he persisted in asserting and reasserting that they brought him nothing and taught him nothing, they nevertheless forced themselves on his inner apprehension with impressions of sonority, immensity, eternity, that seemed to enlarge his perceptive powers. He thought of the voice of many waters; he thought of the peals of an organ; but that to which he was listening had a grandeur transcending them. It was as though Time itself, with all the gathered aspirations, and all the slowly distilled wisdom, of the ages, were breaking into human speech.

"Lord, thou hast been our refuge from one generation to another. Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever the earth and the world were made, thou art God from everlasting and world without end. Thou turnest man to destruction; again thou sayest, 'Come again, ye children of men.' For a thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday."

And then the note changed. The plaintive gave place to the supernal. It was as though he were listening to an anthem—an anthem such as he had never heard, and yet could imagine—an anthem sung by celestial voices to lutes and harps and cymbals of uplifting appeal.

"Now is Christ risen from the dead and become the first-fruits of them that slept. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man is his own order. Christ the first-fruits; afterward—they that are Christ's."

He sat in the front pew on the right, as Remnant had requested. Hilda was farther away from the

central aisle, and they had the little boy between them. Hilda's face, scarcely concealed by her thin black veil, was grave and sweet. There was a quiet happiness in it, too, reminding him of the wonder worked by spring after it has set free a frozen northern river. Billy swung his long legs restlessly, as his father had swung his legs restlessly on the same spot thirty-odd years before.

In order to divert his mind from thoughts too high and heart-searching Charlie Grace gave his attention to details. He tried to make himself realize that Remnant was actually shut up within that long, flower-covered box. Somehow, the pall of flowers over the poor old man seemed a little incongruous. He went back to the day, when he was just Billy's age, on which he had found Remnant dusting the trestles for old Mrs. Badger. He had dusted them for many another since then; and now Jimmy Page had dusted them for him. He looked at Jimmy Page more critically, finding some sympathy with Remnant's ill opinion. He wondered if it would be Jimmy Page who in two years' time would be dusting the trestles for his own long flower-covered box. Doubtless they would cover his box with flowers, too, though the process would be as incongruous in his case as in Remnant's. He wondered if they would bring him to St. David's or give him Christian burial at all. Probably they would—for his wife's and his father's sakes. He knew the Church was lenient, or perhaps lax, in that way. He speculated as to whether this was due to Anglican charity or Anglican pusillanimity—coming to the conclusion that it might be ascribed to a little of both. His own sympathies, as far as he had any, were for

the bold policy of the Roman Church, which reserves its offices for the faithful.

Thus he succeeded in keeping his mind detached till the apostolic strains broke in on him again, like billows that brook no resistance.

"So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption—it is raised in incorruption; it is sown in dishonor—it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness—it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body—it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body. And so it is written: The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit. . . . The first man is of the earth, earthy; the second man is the Lord from heaven. . . . And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly."

Again it was the Voice, the Call, singling him out as though it were addressed to him alone. He was troubled, alarmed. He felt himself rising to follow it—rising whether he would or no—rising and leaving Hilda, and the children, and Esther, and all the interests he had cherished and clung to, behind him—rising as by a spell—rising as under an enchantment—rising because he could do nothing else but rise—and go. Physically he knew he was sitting still in his corner of the pew; and yet in some inward and spiritual and vital constituent of himself he was sure he was being carried—*swept*—irresistibly forward.

Then, suddenly, it was as if all the trumpets of heaven were ringing to him in one great cry.

"So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immor-

tality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: Death is swallowed up in victory!"

"Death is swallowed up in victory! Death is swallowed up in victory! Death is swallowed up in victory!"

He repeated the words as one who says "Amen! Amen! Amen!" He repeated them because they came back to him stored with memories long laid aside, but all at once become living. He repeated them as a phrase too heavily laden with prophecy for him to comprehend as yet, but of which comprehension might not be far away. He recalled the evening —the very first evening his mother lay in her grave— when he had asked his father what the saying meant. It came back to him as if it had been last night. The little study, with the photographs of English cathedrals on the walls; the desk in the middle of the room; the portly figure; the handsome, heavy-lidded face; the pen poised in the hand; the words "My dear Bishop," legible upside down; the odor of boiling fruit and sugar, because Julia had been making raspberry jam. He lived it all again, as though there never had been any such thing as Time.

"Do you understand it?" he could hear his father asking when he had finished his explanation.

"I think I understand some of it, papa."

"Some of it is all you can be expected to understand now. The rest will come when you're older."

Would it come when he was older? Was it coming —now?

He repeated the words again. "Death is swallowed up in victory! Death is swallowed up in victory! Death is swallowed up in victory!"

He remembered that by saying it in a certain way it had a sound like the booming of cannon—or was it the ringing of bells? It had a throb and a measure to it, too. One could walk to it. One could walk to it like a priest or a soldier or a mourner or a man who was going to die. Armies might have walked to it. Holy men and martyrs might have walked to it. Driven slaves might have walked to it. His uncle Frank might have walked to it when he marched toward Gettysburg. His father had walked to it, out of the little church at Horsehair Hill. He himself had walked to it then. He himself was walking to it now. He was walking to it now as he followed when they picked up Remnant's body and carried it down the aisle—down the aisle and out into the porch. He was walking to it alone, with no companionship of friend or wife or child. He was walking to it with shoulders squared, with head erect, with eyes steady, and with something new and unconquerable in his heart. He was walking to it resolutely, undismayed. He was walking to it as along a Way—a Way leading to a Glory—a Glory that seemed to be—a Door.

THE END

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